316 / SEPTEMBER 1999

THE NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST

Iraq

What United Nations sanctions have done

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◆ Pride amidst the pain

◆ The US and Britain's bombing campaign

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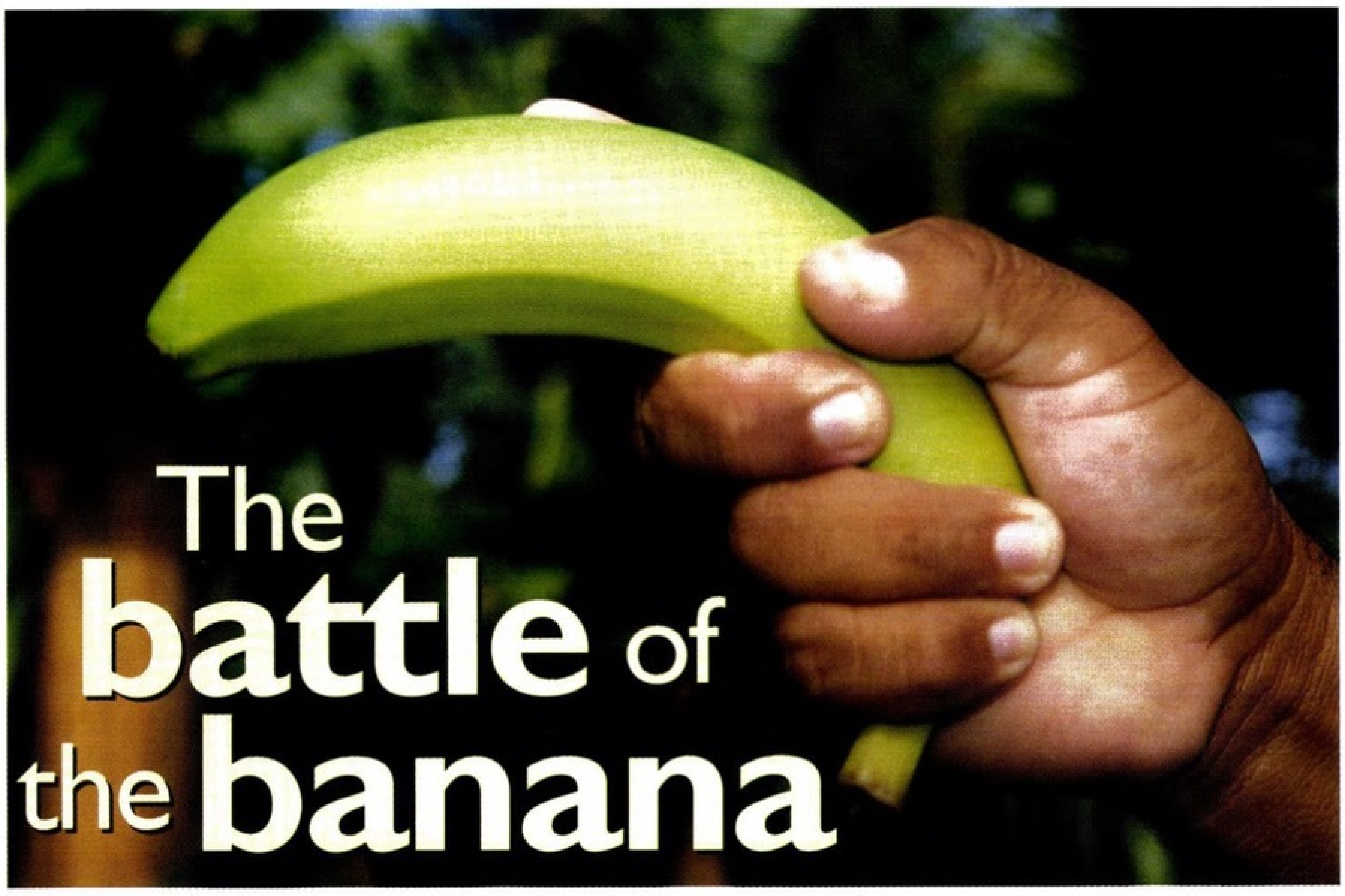

The battle of the banana

DAVID RANSOM

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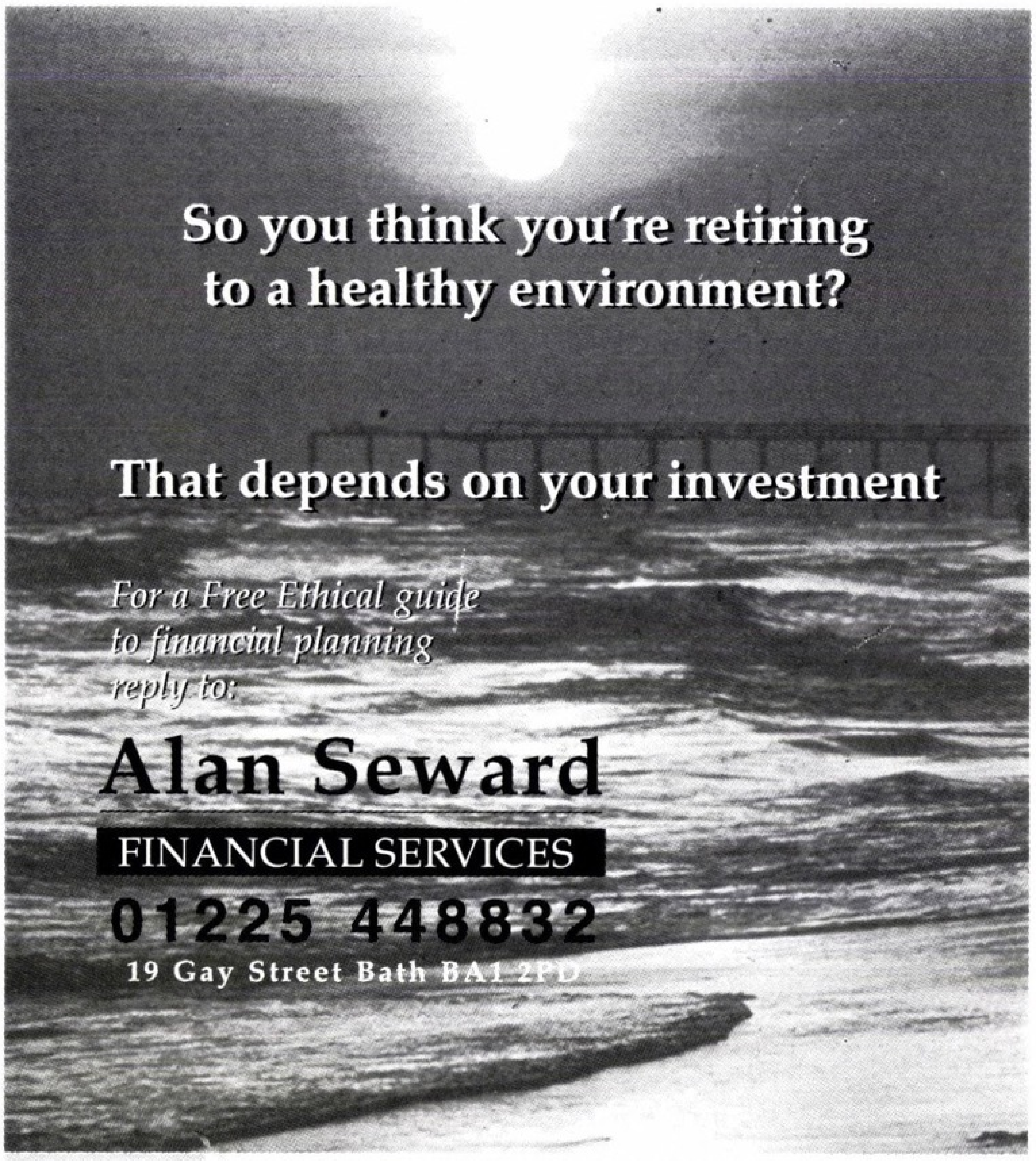

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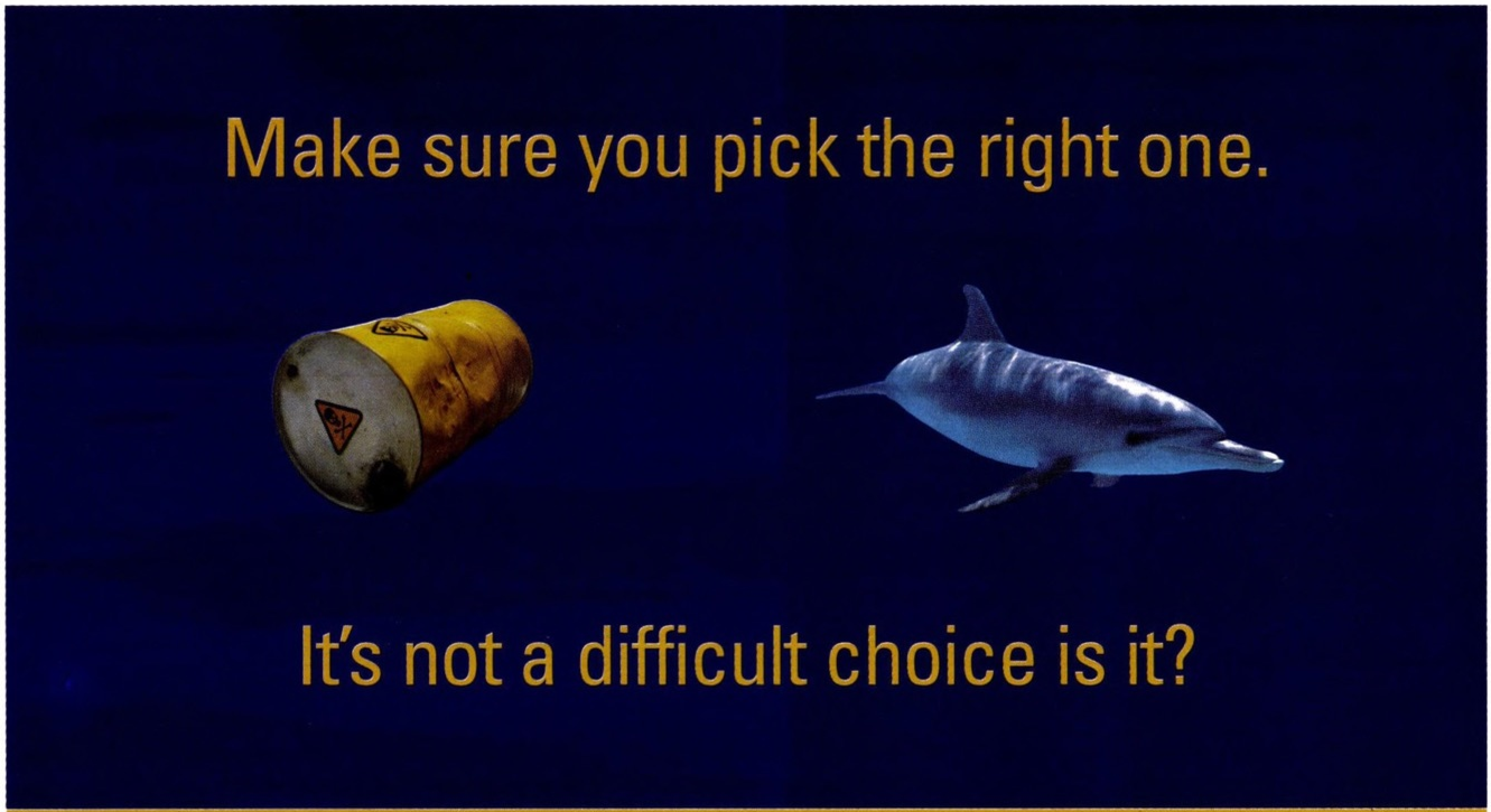
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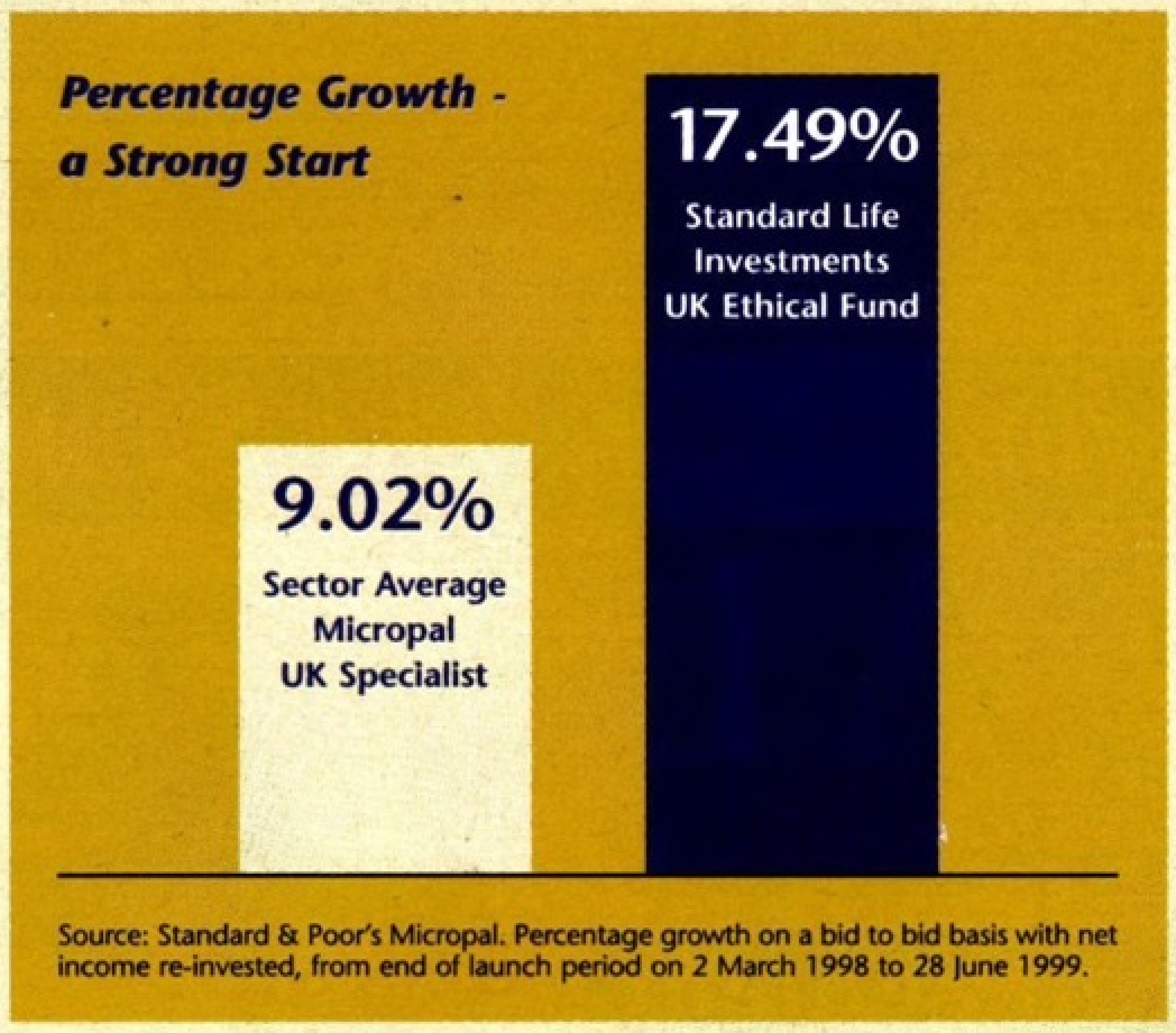

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FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH OF A MOTHER IN BAGHDAD WITH MALNOURISHED TWINS BY **KAREN ROBINSON / FORMAT**.
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **ANDREW KOKOTKA**.

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

Iraq

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

YOU can't fly to Baghdad, I discovered. You have to go to Amman, capital of neighbouring Jordan, and then make a gruelling bus journey through the desert. It can take anything from 12 to 26 hours and you don't know when you begin how long it will be. Young or old, sick or well, rich or poor, this is the only way in – and out.

The bus drivers joke about being pilots on Iraqi Airways; some were. Meanwhile the Iraqi aeroplanes have been sitting in the burning sun on the runways of the Middle East, gathering dust and slowly rotting away, for the nine years since the end of the Gulf War.

Just as nothing can prepare you for such a journey, so the land of Iraq itself is appalling and wonderful and amazing and heartbreaking beyond belief. The courage and ingenuity shown in the face of such hopelessness is harder to bear than in any place I have ever been. It is made especially terrible by the fact that this suffering is being caused by the United Nations, by my own government in Britain and by that other 'herald of democracy', the United States.

Not only that, but no-one reports on what is going on in Iraq any more. It seems as though the complete isolation into which the country has been cast also reflects an indifference on the part of the world's media which I find hard to comprehend. The US and Britain have been bombing Iraq almost daily since December. Each day 250 people die because of sanctions. But who knows? Who cares?

I travelled to Baghdad with someone who cares very much indeed. Irish journalist Felicity Arbuthnot has been a tireless campaigner on behalf of the Iraqi people since the Gulf War in 1991. She has made the bus journey 36 times, and written more than ten times that number of articles on the subject. She lives, breathes, eats and sleeps Iraq. And she takes the flak in the form of both illness and death-threats. But she won't give up.

This magazine came about through my conversations with Felicity, who had written for the **NI** in the issue I did on human rights in 1998. The more I talked to her about what was going on, the more I felt that here was a story that the **NI** must cover. A story not about Saddam Hussein, but about the people who live in the desert land that was once Mesopotamia. Stories like those of the children with cancer (see photo above). This was something that our readers would want to know – and they sure weren't going to find out anywhere else.

So Felicity and I set off across the desert and over the river Tigris to Baghdad. We spent 16 gruelling days travelling around the country in the blistering heat, to hospitals, schools, churches, universities; meeting academics and government ministers, farmers, doctors and priests; seeing the pain of a people who have been vilified and then forgotten by the world; feeling their tears and their dignity.

This magazine is dedicated to them.

Nikki van der Gaag

Nikki van der Gaag
for the ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

Letters

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

Action, not empty words

I am shocked and incensed that the NI, in issue **314**, should print Sarah Blackstock's superficial and pompous dismissal of microcredit. If I were a child in South Asia going hungry to bed, I would expect more to come from microcredit than from the empty words of Ms Blackstock. Does she always base her opinions on the whispered complaints of a disgruntled handful? Are the Bangladeshis all illiterate and dumb, so that not one of them was invited by the **NI** to write in and balance the views of this patronising development tourist? Hot air flows rather easily from rich to poor countries, as the **NI** article demonstrates, but microcredit has moved against the tide from Bangladesh to rich countries, for a simple reason: it involves action, not words, and demonstrable results, not muddled dogma and empty promises.

NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST
Mind games
Cowboy capitalism in Alberta
Junking science
Hoop dreams in the Philippines
Smoke and mirrors in the Balkans
The rise of corporate propaganda

There are many evils and even many windmills to tilt at in this world. By printing this superficial and facile smear against microcredit, the **NI** has, sadly, struck a blow against the hungry. Shame on you.

Joël Almeida,
Trowbridge, England

Hidden from view

After reading your article 'Big foot, small world' in the issue on *Green Cities* (**NI 313**) I wanted to make a comment about the *zaballeen* waste recyclers in Cairo. The writer extols what they are doing in terms of creating urban sustainability but makes no mention of the terrible cost to these people in terms of their health, degradation, alienation from the rest of the population and extreme poverty.

I have seen the total isolation of the place where a large group of these people live. They live in deplorable conditions; tumble-down shacks constructed of anything suitable they have managed to salvage from the rubbish. They are surrounded by large piles of rotting garbage. The stench all over the area is unbelievable; the people are dressed in rags and as filthy as the rubbish they live with. They walk, breath and eat in this stinking mess.

The *zaballeen* may be playing a part in recycling waste but active urban democracy should not mean that people are abused and used. It appears to be a way for a city to shirk its responsibilities, to show others that they are doing their bit for the environment by recycling. But the real cost is well hidden from view.

Karen Tidswell
Great Preston, England

Disability expectancy

The brief article 'Eye-Opening Experience' (**NI 313**) illuminates one important portion of the disability picture. We can't underestimate the importance of programs to deal with the 80 per cent of cases of blindness in the Majority World that, as suggested in the article, are preventable. But at the same time we must realize that 20 per cent will remain blind and many of rest will acquire disabilities, mainly due to the successes of development.

Two acronyms popularly in use reflect the importance of dealing with lives with disabilities. DALYs or 'Disability Adjusted Life Years' reflect the assumption that all life years are not considered to be equal, clearly the assumption of non-disabled statisticians oblivious to the importance of working for a world in which no adjustment would need to be made. DE or 'Disability Expectancy' is joining life expectancy as an important quality of life indicator. We can hope that the individuals who enjoy the gift of sight will also live to enjoy a large disability expectancy.

Art Blaser
Orange, US

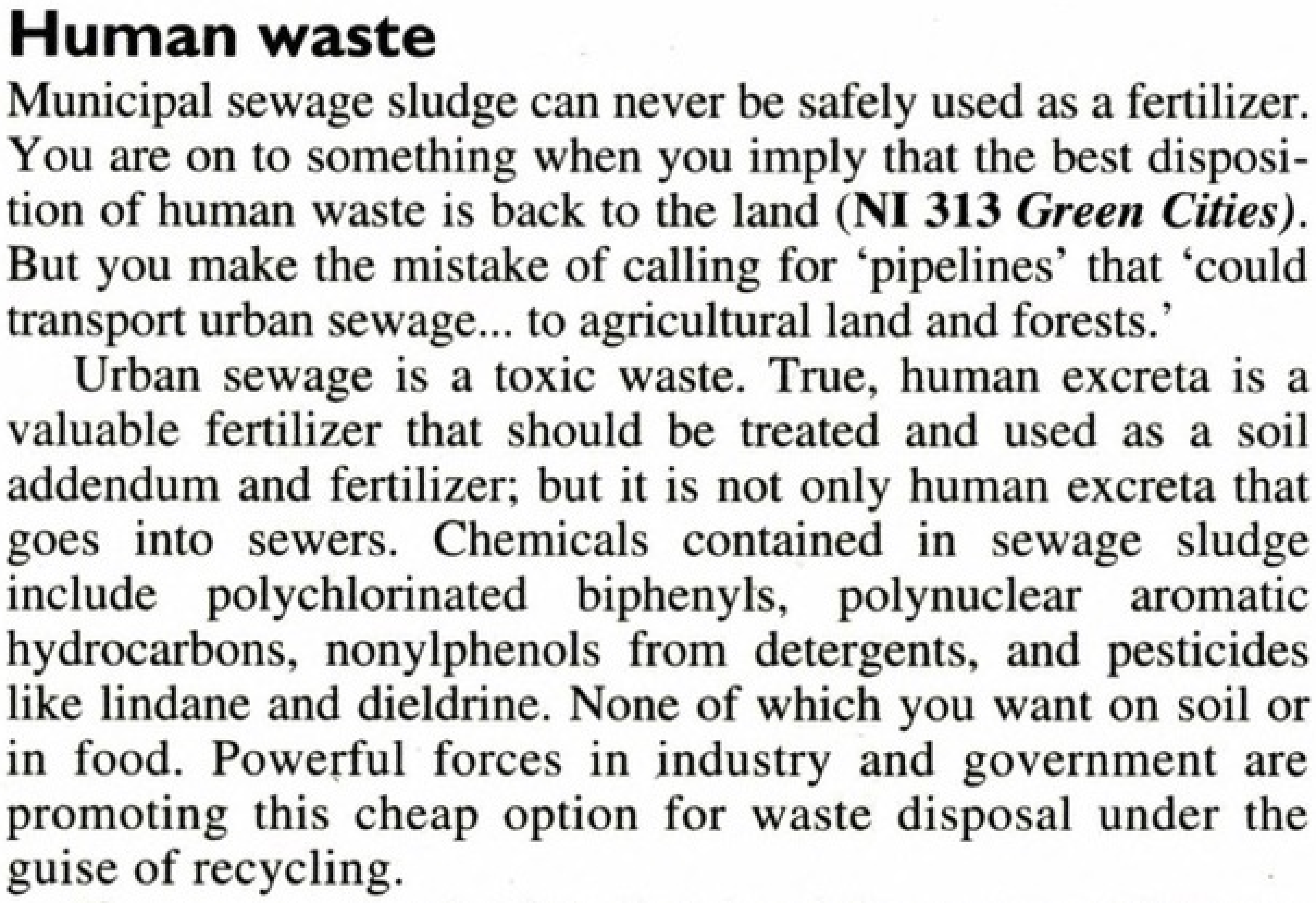
Human waste

Municipal sewage sludge can never be safely used as a fertilizer. You are on to something when you imply that the best disposition of human waste is back to the land (**NI 313 *Green Cities***). But you make the mistake of calling for 'pipelines' that 'could transport urban sewage... to agricultural land and forests.'

Urban sewage is a toxic waste. True, human excreta is a valuable fertilizer that should be treated and used as a soil addendum and fertilizer; but it is not only human excreta that goes into sewers. Chemicals contained in sewage sludge include polychlorinated biphenyls, polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, nonylphenols from detergents, and pesticides like lindane and dieldrine. None of which you want on soil or in food. Powerful forces in industry and government are promoting this cheap option for waste disposal under the guise of recycling.

If you are not to play into their hand then you must be careful of the language you use. If it is recycling you are after, then talk first of source separation. Exploring a healthy future for urban environments means taking the bold step of calling for no pipelines. Rethink human excreta management with the goal of realizing safe and valuable end-products. Then we won't be talking about 'waste' at all.

Laura Orlando
Boston, Massachusetts, US



Nestlé correction

Your report about Nestlé (**NI 313**) featured a very misleading photograph under the caption 'For sale – Nestlé's global lies'. You clearly intended to imply that the infant formula pack on the right, which features a picture of a mother and baby, is a Nestlé product. In fact, it is not.

This is typical of many accusations that are made against Nestlé of breaking the World Health Organization Code. Often the product is not ours and is a locally manufactured item, in this case made by a local milk-product factory. In the interests of accurate journalism, I would ask you to include a correction in a future issue.

Hilary Parsons
Corporate Affairs Manager, Nestlé,
Croydon, Surrey, England

Virtual slavery

I am teaching in Qatar. There is virtual slavery here for a lot of expatriate Indians/Nepalese/Filipinos and this is all condoned by the UK. 'There are no human-rights problems here' was stated by a British embassy official but we see a few, like small children riding camels and workers out in the sun. The law here is that above 42°C outside work stops. The temperature reading is taken at 6.00 am; by 10.00 am it is often over 50°C but the guys have to work. All of this is often condoned and no effort is made by the foreign companies here to try to improve conditions.

Paul Robert Smith
Qatar

War Resisters

On your 'Own the Peace' page of peace organizations in **NI 311** on peace and reconciliation, I was surprised to find no mention of War Resisters International. This organization works to strengthen non-violent methods of dealing with conflict. It can be contacted at 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DY, or in the US via the War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St, New York, NY 10012. The website is www.nonviolence.org/wrl

D Geise
New York, US

Debts owing

I am writing in response to your issue on Third World debt (**NI 312**). While I fully support the campaign to end the debt of Third World nations, I also believe that it is equally important to ensure that the money that was once used to pay debt, is used for health, education and welfare purposes instead of arms. The 52 countries that the Jubilee 2000 Coalition has nominated to have their debt removed include those like Burma and Nigeria. Judging by past articles in the **NI**, I am not confident that the governments of these countries would put the extra revenue to good use.

This is an issue that the **NI** and the Jubilee 2000 Coalition have overlooked. It is vital that the money once used for debt relief goes to the people most in need, and not just to fund bloodthirsty dictatorships.

Nic Townsend
Melbourne, Australia

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

Letter from Lebanon

Death of a firefighter

Reem Haddad witnesses the bombing of a power station by Israeli warplanes and finds herself haunted by one particular death.

LOOKING back I can't really remember which of the firefighters was Wissam Chaaban. They all looked so young and eager when I stepped back to let them pass into the blazing inferno inside the building. I remember debating whether I should sneak in after them. But the soldiers were forcefully preventing all reporters from entering the burning electricity power station.

Israeli warplanes had bombed the station less than an hour before as part of a wide-ranging series of air strikes against the country's infrastructural targets. The air strikes, the heaviest in three years, were in response to a rocket attack by Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas against northern Israel earlier in the day. The rocket assault, in turn, was retaliation for the wounding of six Lebanese civilians over the previous four days in Israeli artillery bombardments.

While the residents living around the power station were fleeing the area, we reporters were trying to draw nearer to see what was going on.

All I could think of at that point were the praises of a satisfied newspaper editor. I gave little thought to the firefighters passing by though I did stare at them – rather enviously.

'Now you reporters get out of here,' yelled an army officer. 'We don't know what machinery could explode in there. It's too dangerous.'

Just as we were about to argue our case, the warplanes returned for another raid. A flash of light and an appallingly loud explosion scattered us. Amid screams, journalists and soldiers ran in panic trying to seek shelter. The next few minutes were pure chaos as cowering journalists stared at each other in fear and soldiers forced everyone to retreat even further.

It was only then that it suddenly hit us: where were the firefighters we had just let through into the building minutes before the bomb had hit?

As ambulances raced passed us, we all held our breath. Some firefighters, we were told, were badly burned but still alive. Others couldn't be reached.

Fear turned to outrage. It had been over an hour since the first Israeli air raid. The Israelis must have realized that the scene would be crawling with firefighters and reporters but they attacked the power plant again regardless.

But our anger was overshadowed at the thought of the young men burning inside. Sombrely, we waited for any news of them.

Five, it transpired, were killed. One of them was 22-year-old Wissam Chaaban, though it was only the next morning that I found out his name. It was his mother who informed me. Dishevelled and in bedroom slippers, she ran into the street calling his name in grief. My journalistic training of not getting emotionally involved completely left me. I was already involved. I was one of the last people to see her son alive. When I told her this, she clung to me and would not let go.

'Then you know how handsome he was, how wonderful, how perfect,' she said. 'Of course you liked him, everybody did.'

I said he was wonderful and perfect.

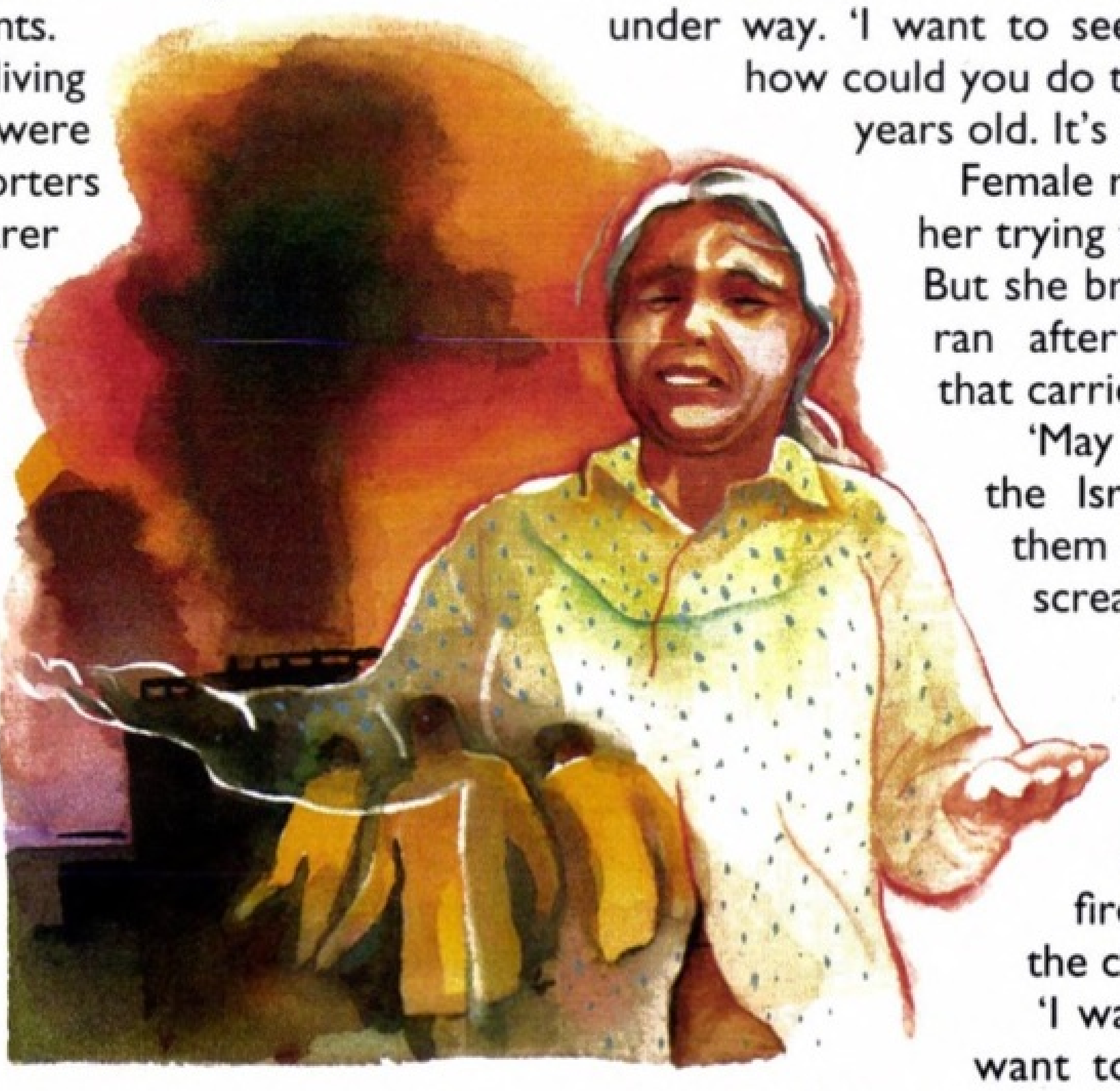
'My son, my son,' she yelled as she ran towards the mosque where funeral prayers were under way. 'I want to see him. Oh, God, how could you do this? He's only 22 years old. It's too early.'

Female relatives ran after her trying to hold her back. But she broke through and ran after the ambulance that carried his corpse.

'May God strike down the Israelis by sending them earthquakes,' she screamed.

Pushing aside relatives, she joined the hundreds of men walking behind firefighters carrying the coffin of her son.

'I want to see him, I want to see my baby's face,' she yelled among chants of *Allah u Akbar* (God is greatest). But since Wissam's face was burned beyond recognition, her request was refused.


SARAH JOHN

Turning to me, she tearfully demanded to know whether Wissam suffered. I told her that he died instantly and didn't feel a thing. Grateful, she held me close to her before meekly letting herself be led by relatives back to her house.

But it was another 22-year-old firefighter, Danny Abu Daher, swamped in bandages and lying in a hospital bed, who recounted Wissam's horrific death.

'There was a sudden explosion and I was thrown across to the other side and my clothes were completely torn off my body,' he recalled. 'I looked up to see two of my friends knocked into the fire and burning. Israelis have firefighters in their own country. We were only there to put out the fire and protect the people. We don't even carry knives. Why do they do this to us?' ■

Reem Haddad is a reporter for the *Daily Star* in Beirut.

Update

BRAZIL

Payback time

Debt ruled as unjust

Amazonian Indians: just one of the groups taking aim at onerous debt.

NIGEL DICKINSON / STILL PICTURES

An unprecedented 'court' held session in Brazil to pass sentence on the country's external debt. The jury ruled that the debt had already been repaid and that requiring continued payment is illegal, as is postponing development 'in order to honor those commitments'.

The External Debt Tribunal drew 1,200 participants including Brazilian judges and lawyers, unemployed city dwellers and Pataxó indigenous people from the Amazon.

With a debt of $235 billion, Brazil is Latin America's most indebted country. 'Between 1989 and 1997, Brazil paid $216 billion in interest, and today we still owe $212 billion,' a document released at the tribunal stated.

Tribunal participants called the debt situation in Latin America 'unsustainable'. Together, Latin America and Caribbean nations must pay an estimated $123 billion per annum in debt service and interest alone, without reducing the principal. 'Not even in colonial times was there such a flow of capital out of Latin America, a region that now looks like the scene of a world war because of the number of people dying of hunger and preventable diseases,' Brazilian lawyer Arístides Junqueira says. Brazil has sent more money out of the country in debt payments than it has received in foreign investment.

The tribunal condemned Latin American governments for indebting their countries and committing themselves to repaying loans with money that should have been dedicated to social programs, as well as for making decisions affecting the entire population without consultation. 'We must link the external debt to the social debt, because debt payment diverts significant national resources that should go to education, health and housing. The debt is related to poverty, and our ethical proposal is that the economy must be placed at the service of the people,' tribunal member Bishop Valentini explains.

'God wants us all to have life with dignity and life in abundance,' he says, adding that the tribunal and the International Jubilee 2000 Coalition, which is campaigning for debt forgiveness, 'are signs that we are turning globalization into a form of solidarity.'

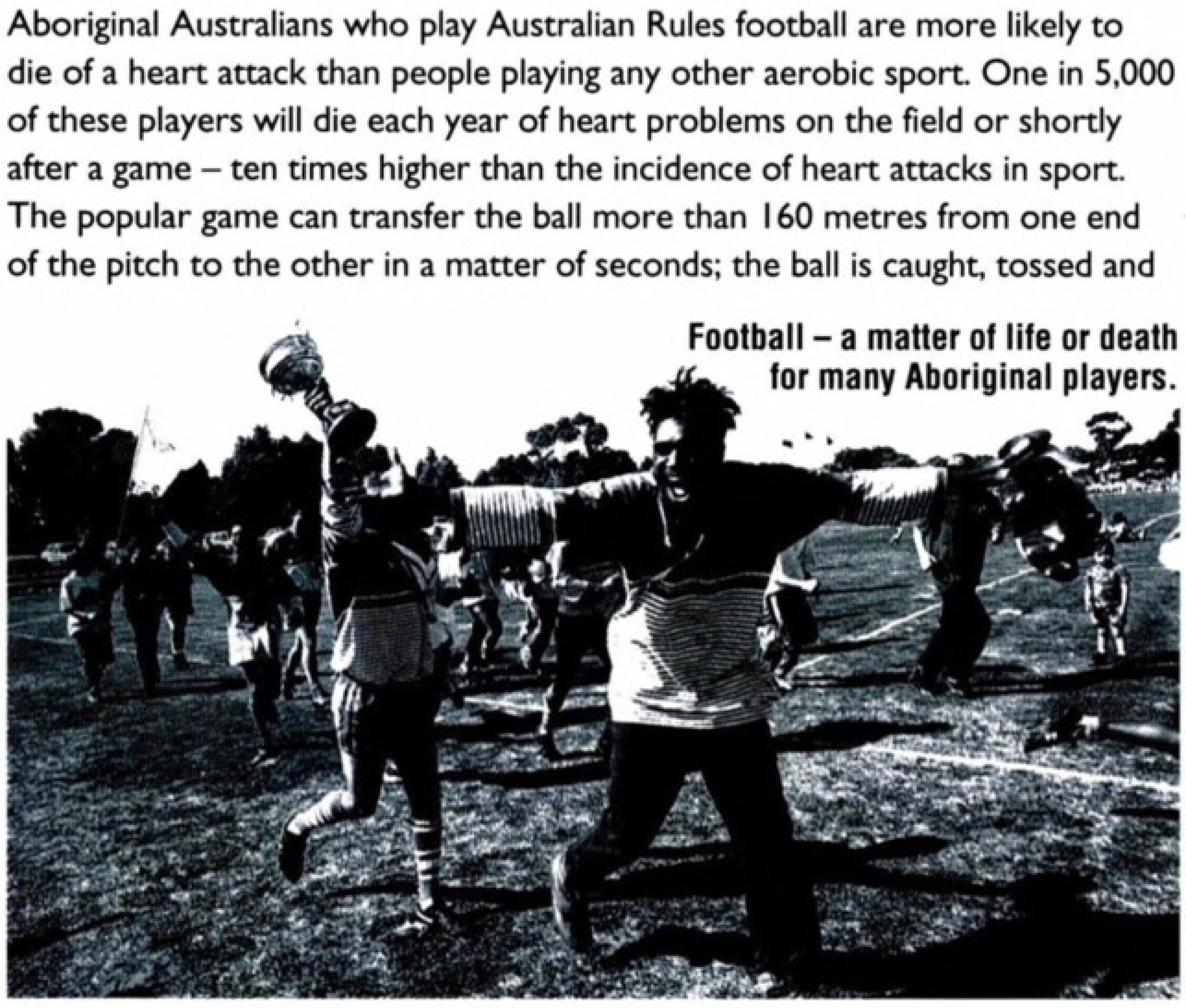
Pastor Jeter Ramalho said in the closing session of the tribunal that the debt 'is not simply a matter of numbers. We are facing the globalization of injustice. The debt is not only external, it is eternal.'

'It is not just a matter of forgiving the debt and forgetting about it, because countries would go into debt again,' he insists. 'We need to change the financial hegemony that rules the world.' ■

Andrés Cañizález/*Latin America Press*
Vol 31 No 21

Game of chance

Aboriginal Australians who play Australian Rules football are more likely to die of a heart attack than people playing any other aerobic sport. One in 5,000 of these players will die each year of heart problems on the field or shortly after a game – ten times higher than the incidence of heart attacks in sport. The popular game can transfer the ball more than 160 metres from one end of the pitch to the other in a matter of seconds; the ball is caught, tossed and kicked often around 50 metres up into the air. 'It's both aerobic, requiring a high oxygen intake, and requires a physical toughness you don't get with soccer,' says Mark Young of the Australian Institute of Sport. The rate of sudden cardiac death among Aboriginal players in the tropical Northern Territory is 40 times greater than for the mostly white players of Victoria. The difference is partly attributed to the fact that Aboriginal Australians are 5.5 times more likely to die of heart attacks than white Australians. But extreme conditions of heat and alcohol consumption the night before a match increase the risk for Aboriginal players, according to Young who advocates players be screened for cardiovascular problems and educated about the risk of smoking, excessive drinking and undertaking sport in hot weather.



Football – a matter of life or death for many Aboriginal players.

STEPHEN DUPONT / PANOS PICTURES

New Scientist Vol 162 No 2189

Police killers

According to recent US State Department statistics, more civilians were killed by police last year in Jamaica than in any other Caribbean or Latin American country. During 1998, 145 civilians were killed by police, continuing the Jamaica Constabulary Force's average of more than 100 civilian killings in each of the last five years. In comparison, 75 people were killed by police last year in the Dominican Republic, 31 in Haiti and 21 in Colombia.

Latin America Press Vol 31 No 21

UNCED: Action not hot air

A warning ignored – nations fail to keep promises about the environment.

MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES

Rio ratings revealed

The General Assembly of the United Nations, meeting more than five years after the Rio Earth Summit, has found that the performance rating of governmental action for the environment is next to zero. The Framework Convention on Climate Change – opened for signatures in Rio to deal with the problem of global warming – has seen little action to set binding targets on controlling greenhouse-gas emissions by the developed North. The Biodiversity Convention – established to safeguard the world's threatened biodiversity – has not yet been signed by the US, the world's largest user of biodiversity resources and knowledge. Also the global action plan for environment, Agenda 21, is largely under-funded. The total global funding for the environment has actually declined after Rio.

Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri/Third World Network Features

Patents with a sting

Hands off our bread: AstraZeneca patents cover wheat, rice and maize.

MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES

AstraZeneca, a British agrochemical company, has come under scrutiny due to a number of patent applications which could have disastrous consequences for farmers in the Majority World. An ActionAid report points out that the company's patent applications cover more than 90 countries including 30 developing countries and many staple foods such as rice, wheat and maize. Patent applications include: genetically modified systems which 'switch on' plant growth when chemicals are applied so that farmers must buy the 'chemical switch' along with plant seeds; insecticide-producing plants using toxins from the deadly Australian funnelweb spider, the fat-tailed scorpion, wasps and cone snails; and plants made resistant to multiple herbicides. These new techno-crops may not just be a feature of the North – some observers estimate that by 2002 the majority of genetically modified crops will be in the South. For more information contact: ActionAid, Hamlyn House, Macdonald Road, Archway, London N19 5PG. Tel: 44 171 561 7561. Fax: 44 171 281 5146.
E-mail: campaigns@actionaid.org.uk Web: www.actionaid.org

Growing concern

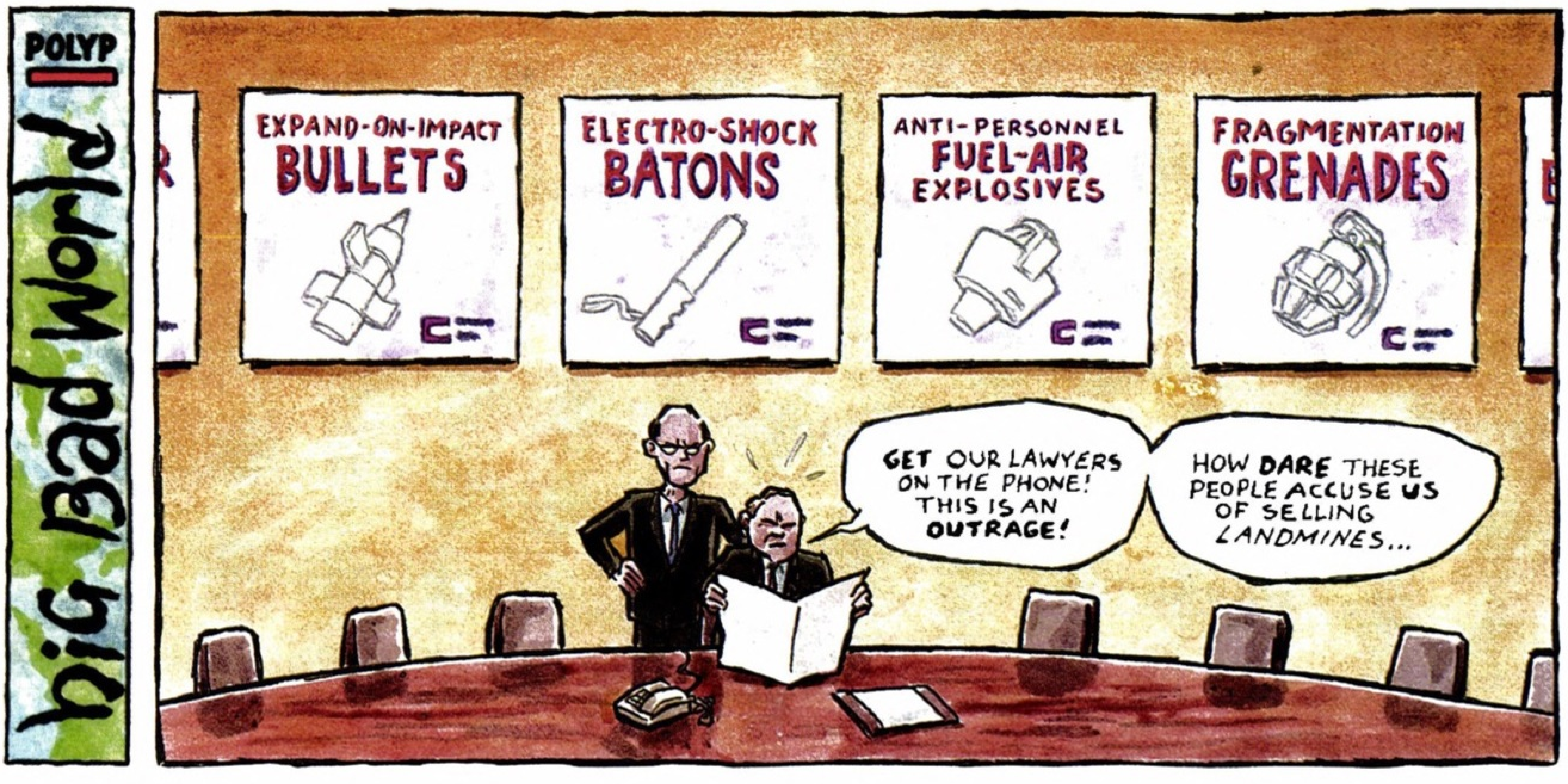
Africa's Pygeum tree is threatened with extinction due to demand by pharmaceutical companies to manufacture a drug used in treating prostate problems among elderly men. 'Prunus Africana was once well distributed throughout Africa, from Ethiopia to South Africa and from the west coast to the island of Madagascar,' says Tony Simmons, a researcher at the Nairobi-based International Centre For Research in Agroforestry. But now nearly 60 per cent of men over 50 years old in Europe and America suffer from prostate-related diseases, putting a demand on the production of drugs only obtained from the dark trunk of the tree. All that is left is a limited number of trees mainly in Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kate Schreckenberg, a senior fellow at the British Overseas Development Institute says: 'We are asking ourselves what kind of money farmers can earn from growing the tree and whether there are markets out there to sustain them.' Currently, the whole bark of a 40-metre-tall tree can earn as much as $500, a sum which Schreckenberg says is too little considering the tree takes up to 20 years to start producing decent bark and up to five years for the bark to heal after removal. 'Benefits from the tree must be shared equitably, trickling down to the farmers,' she says.

Judith Achieng/IPS/Third World Network Features

US hauled into court

Several Cuban social organizations have sued the United States for nearly 40 years of 'hostile acts'. The claimants, who filed the $181.1 billion lawsuit in a Havana court, are demanding that Washington pay damages for the deaths of 3,478 Cuban citizens and the disabilities of 2,099 others, whom they call 'victims of the aggressive US policy' toward Cuba. The list includes people killed in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, organized by the United States and Cubans opposed to President Fidel Castro, and deaths caused by dengue fever which Cuba alleges was introduced to the country by the United States. The claimants include Cuba's central trade union, the National Association of Small Farmers, the Federation of Cuban Women and the Federation of University Students.

Latin America Press Vol 31 No 22


POLYP
big bad world
EXPAND-ON-IMPACT BULLETS
ELECTRO-SHOCK BATONS
ANTI-PERSONNEL FUEL-AIR EXPLOSIVES
FRAGMENTATION GRENADES
GET OUR LAWYERS ON THE PHONE! THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!
HOW DARE THESE PEOPLE ACCUSE US OF SELLING LANDMINES...

Update

CANADA

Dangerous delivery

Activists deliver a clear message against nuclear industry's scheme

'PRIME Minister Jean Chrétien wants to turn our country into a nuclear dump, so we thought we'd start with his constituency's office,' declares a man carting a symbolic barrel of plutonium. Wearing white suits and gas masks, a troupe of Greenpeace activists follow the barrel down the streets of Shawinigan, a few hours north of Montreal, for one of the highlights of their Canadian 'plutonium tour'.

The activists oppose a plan from Atomic Energy Canada Limited (AECL) and the Department of Foreign Affairs, who hope to import 100 tons of plutonium extracted from old US and Russian warheads. A mix of plutonium and uranium (called MOX fuel) would be burned in Ontario's nuclear plants over the next 25 years. Foreign Affairs, which says that 'eliminating plutonium is our effort at disarmament' is planning an imminent test.

But the plan has many worried, including Johanne Fillion, director of Greenpeace-Québec. 'Weapons-grade plutonium being shipped around would be a prime target for terrorists,' she comments. 'The plan reinforces the wrong idea that plutonium is a valuable commodity. However the more of it that travels around the world, the greater the risk of proliferation.'

Today, MOX-processing installations already function in France, UK, Belgium, India, Japan and Russia. Fillion adds that: 'The sole beneficiaries of plutonium imports will be Canada's nuclear mafia, who are determined to revive a dying industry.' Two years ago, the Canadian nuclear industry suffered a major blow as seven reactors were shut down because of serious safety problems.

Critics remark that the scheme could boost sales of Canadian CANDU reactors, which are heavily promoted abroad. Indeed, a MOX-burning capacity could be a strong asset on the international market. Countries using this technology, such as Argentina, South Korea, and probably soon Turkey, could also see the new capacity as a golden opportunity to get their hands on plutonium, the core component of nuclear weapons. In proceeding with the plan, the Canadian Government ignores a growing opposition, including the all-party parliamentary committee who rejected the plan. The International Great Lakes/St Lawrence Mayors' Conference, concerned about the extreme toxicity of the substance, also voted unanimously against the scheme. The Mayor of Sarnia, one of the likely entry points, said he would engage in civil disobedience if the shipment went ahead. ■

Christian Huot

NON AU
NON AU PLUTONIUM
GREENPEACE
NON AU PLUTONIUM
GREENPEACE
NIUM PLUTO

CHRISTIAN HUOT

Turning the tables – plutonium is dumped in the Prime Minister's office.

TRYGVE BØLSTAD / PANOS PICTURES

Cigarette break – 75,000 Chinese a year die due to smoking

Smoking controversy

The World Health Organization (WHO) is formulating a global convention against smoking, which kills 3.5 million people annually. WHO Director-General Gro Harlem Brundtland says the treaty may call on governments to impose taxes on tobacco, provide guidelines against tobacco advertising and lay down ground rules against cigarette smuggling. WHO argues that transnational corporations are shifting their focus to marketing in the Third World, which accounts for 70 per cent of all tobacco deaths worldwide. In China tobacco is already blamed for 75,000 deaths annually and this is expected to rise to three million by the time today's young smokers reach middle age. Derek Yach, head of WHO's Tobacco-Free Initiative told a delegation of the International Growers Association that WHO is not against tobacco farming but tobacco could kill ten million annually by the 2020s. Scientific adviser to WHO, Richard Peto adds: 'WHO cannot simply stand by and count the dead.'

Thalif Deen/Third World Network Features

JOHN CANCALOSI / STILL PICTURES

Endangered – NZ birds are some of the most at risk.

The Dodo revisited

Eleven per cent of all known bird species are threatened with extinction, according to the World Resources Institute. Most of this decline is due to fragmentation or loss of habitat. New Zealand, South Korea, the Philippines and Madagascar all have over 10 per cent of bird populations threatened with extinction.

Down to Earth Vol 8 No 2

Quote

'Mr Clinton does not have the strength of character to be a war criminal.'

Henry Kissinger.

KAREN ROBINSON / FORMAT

Iraq The pride and the pain

Nikki van der Gaag finds that human rights have a different meaning when viewed from Baghdad.

'DON'T talk to me about human rights.' Nasra al-Sa'adoun's voice is firm. 'Your analysis is too simplistic. You see the West as good and Iraq as bad. You think you have the right to interfere in our affairs because you have always done so.'

Nasra is a neat, grey-haired woman with a degree from the Sorbonne in Paris and a knowledge of British history which far exceeds my own. She can quote chapter and verse of the deals, the betrayals; the whole complex web of Anglo-Iraqi relationships so redolent of colonial and neo-colonial relationships around the world. In a word, she blames the British. It is hardly surprising. Her grandfather, who was Iraq's Prime Minister, committed suicide rather than surrender to the British. His statue now stands in one of Baghdad's main streets, which is named after him, a small, Gandhi-like figure in bronze. He was 40 years old.

On 17 January this year, the ninth anniversary of the Gulf War, Mustapha, Nasra's husband, friend and partner died suddenly at the age of 52. A heart attack, they said.

No-one knows why fit and healthy people like Mustapha just collapse, leaving their families deep in grief. Iraq

FELICITY ARBUTHNOT

A smiling Nasra before the death of her husband: her grandfather committed suicide rather than surrender to the British.

is festooned with the black banners that announce a new death. Perhaps you can die of a broken heart after all.

Nasra feels that she is facing yet another bereavement; the death of her country: 'Where are our human rights here in Iraq? We have no electricity, no clean water, no trains, no safe cars, an environment which is being destroyed, and you are bombing us every day. I tell you, we would rather have a real war than this slow death. This is genocide.'

The sanctions are the most draconian ever imposed by the United Nations. The UN is caught in the ambiguous position of being both the cause of suffering and the body responsible for alleviating it. These are the only sanctions this century imposed as a complete embargo on all trade (with a few exceptions) rather than just an embargo on particular goods or areas. In this sense, says Sabah Al-Mukhtar, an Iraqi living in London who is President of the League of Arab Lawyers, 'the whole country is being kept prisoner and denied the basic requirements for survival.' Denis Halliday, who resigned from his post as Humanitarian Co-ordinator in Iraq rather than administer the sanctions regime, puts it even more strongly: 'We are in the process of destroying an entire nation. It is as simple and as terrifying as that. It is illegal and immoral.'[1]

The figures speak for themselves. UNICEF believes that between 5,000 and 6,000 children die each month as a direct result of sanctions. The mortality rate for children under five has risen from 48 per 1,000 in 1990 to 122 per 1,000 in 1997[2]. One in four children is malnourished; a rise of 73 per cent since 1991.

UNICEF estimates that between 5,000 and 6,000 children die each month as a direct result of sanctions

And yet the country is sitting on probably the second-largest oil reserves in the world. In May 1996 Iraq was allowed to sell a limited amount of oil in return for food, but this improved the situation only marginally. The infrastructure does not exist to pump the allocated oil, and oil prices in any case remain very low. With 47 per cent of the oil money siphoned off by the UN, the Iraqi Government ultimately gets around $1.5 billion worth of humanitarian goods over a six-month period. It costs $600 million to give each person one kilo of sugar over the same period.

The deprivation is not only physical, but emotional as well. Many parents of the young people growing up today were well-educated, well-fed and well-travelled, but the new generation is angry, hungry and isolated from the world. New young cadres in the ruling Ba'ath party believe that President Saddam Hussein and the current Government have compromised too much with the West, and take a much harder line. Other children simply see the US as the enemy. This is brought home to me when I meet Dina, aged 7, whose mother and father are both civil engineers. Dina is keen to show me her drawings, which are detailed and imaginative. Many are the princesses and mermaids, mummies, daddies and school friends that you would expect from someone her age.

But then I come across one of a soldier. He is standing on the right of the page and seems to be shooting something on the left. 'What is this?' I ask her. She whispers something shyly. Her parents are clearly embarrassed. 'She says this is an American soldier and he is shooting the flowers.'

'But why?'

'She says Americans don't like flowers'.

It is not surprising. Dina, like all children

CAROLINE PENN / FORMAT

Empty house: this woman, Bayda Ihsan, is one of many middle-class people who has had to sell everything to buy food and medicine.

in Iraq, has known only an aggressive, punitive West. The flowers in her family's garden bloom, but up to half the palm trees – in a country which formerly exported 80 per cent of the world's dates – have died. This is due to not only a lack of agricultural equipment and chemicals but also the fallout from the Gulf War which has so polluted Iraq's environment. Radioactivity from depleted uranium (from Western bombs and shells) leaves a terrible blight on the lives of those Iraqi children who suffer from cancers and leukaemias (see the article on page 12).

The Sanctions Committee

The UN Sanctions Committee, based in New York, has the power to veto any materials from going to Iraq. The most stringent prohibition includes items considered to be of potential use in the chemical, biological or nuclear weapons industry; including syringes, nozzles, computer equipment, graphite for pencils, chlorine for water treatment, x-rays, pesticides, isotopes for the treatment and diagnosis of cancers and tetra nitrate to treat angina. Over the years a comprehensive list of prohibited products has been built up – this can include anything not deemed 'essential'.

Among the many thousands of prohibited articles have been:

- **Ambulances**
- **Baking soda**
- **Books, magazines, envelopes, paper**
- **Cloth (including shroud cloth)**
- **Coffins**
- **Hearing aids**
- **Light bulbs**
- **Cassettes, CDs and videos**
- **Paints**
- **Shampoo**
- **Shoes and shoe polish**
- **Spark plugs**
- **Toys**
- **Washing machines**
- **Watches**
- **Wheelbarrows**

Compiled by Elias Davidson, 22 December 1997

Closing the door: a sale of second-hand refridgerators and washing machines.

CAROLINE PENN / FORMAT

In addition, in the north and south, people face almost-daily bombings,[3] which began when the US and the Britain launched Operation Desert Fox in December last year. The death toll then was over 10,000. And the bombing has never stopped.

We ourselves witnessed the aftermath of just one of these everyday tragedies. A family of six shepherds (the youngest six years old), their herd of 100 sheep and their sheep dog have been wiped out (see the photo on the next page). The animals are still there; their stench fills the air. You can see a ripped tire, a blasted shoe, and fragments of metal, testaments to more unnecessary deaths. The local cemetery holds only two graves; there were simply not enough pieces left to bury.

The US and Britain justify the bombing of the 'no-fly zones' with the claim that they are protecting the citizens by bombing the military. Yet in the place where the shepherds died there were no camps or soldiers to be seen, just the village of Basheka, known for its vineyards, some three kilometres distant. Otherwise it was just bare earth with mountains in the distance. But somehow a military directive calls this a 'target- rich' zone.[4] It was Gandhi who pointed out, 'what does it matter to the widows, the orphans, the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought in the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?'

Jawdat al Kazzi is a priest from southern Lebanon who has lived in northern Iraq for 13 years. He is grey-haired, with a quiet manner which somehow makes his fury palpable: 'If Clinton and Blair were really Christians they wouldn't do this to us.' His voice is clear, determined.

'But then, you see, a capitalist society cannot be truly Christian because it puts money before everything else. Dollars before people. Here in Iraq, we have no money any more. Iraqis have lost everything. But they still have their morality; they are a very moral people.'

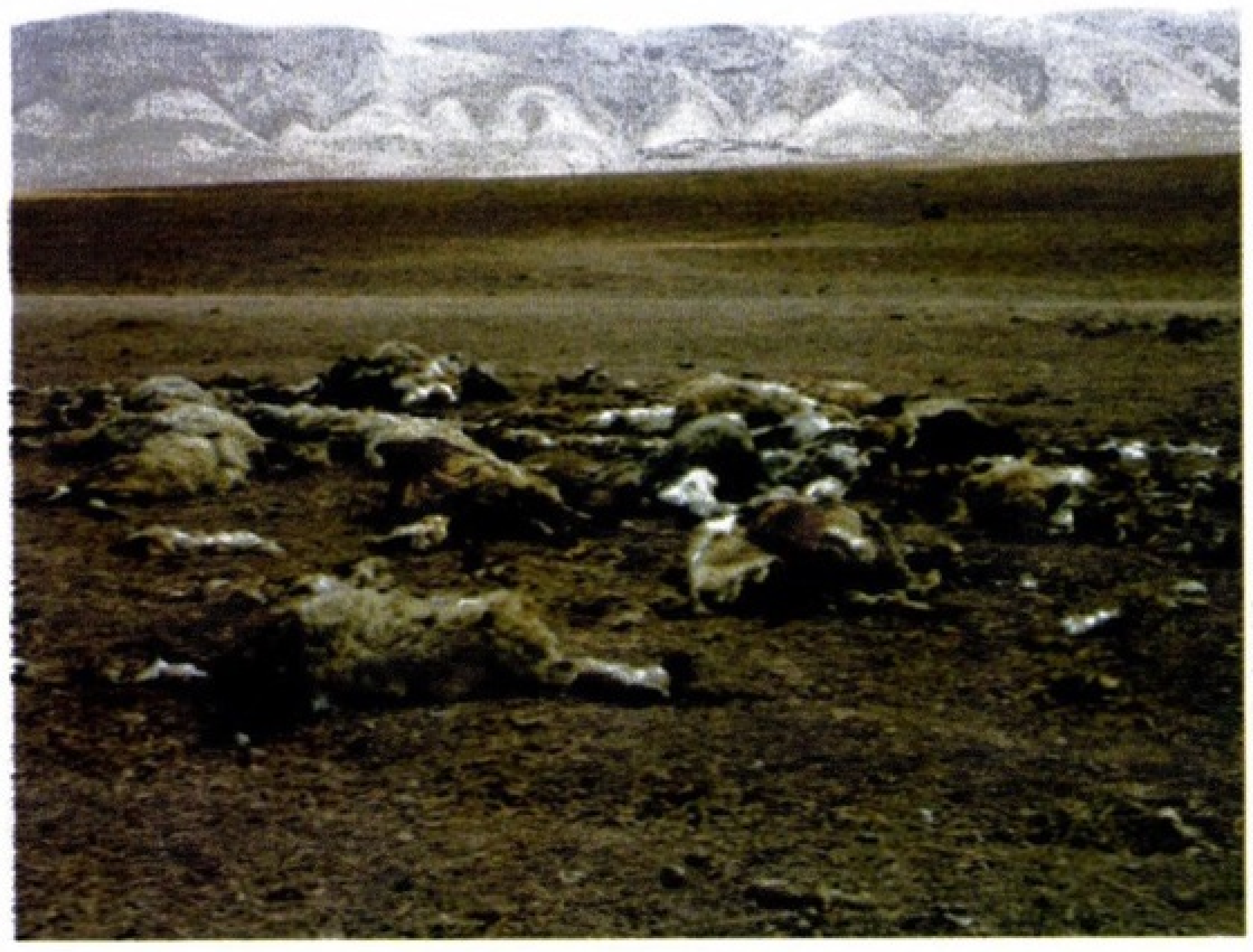
Sanctions are amongst the most powerful and lethal weapons in our armoury, said US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright

We sit in the flickering light of an oil lamp in a Dominican church, whose French connections go back to the wife of Napoleon III who donated the church bell. The priest points out the inconsistency of the American stand: 'There is one rule for Iraq, another for America's friends, like Israel. America allows Israel to break all the rules, to ignore 37 UN resolutions, to invade and occupy Palestine, Lebanon and Syria; to have a nuclear bomb and chemical weapons... and what happens? Nothing. Yet Iraq has honoured the Security Council resolutions but the US will not permit the lifting of the embargo. This is hypocrisy of the highest order.'

'Sanctions' said US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, 'are amongst the most powerful and lethal weapons in our armoury.'

Yet the other irony in all this is that the sanctions and bombing regime has achieved the opposite of what was intended. It has consolidated rather than weakened the Government's power; Saddam Hussein has become for many in Iraq – and indeed in the Middle East – a symbol of Iraqi resistance and determination never to bow to Western pressure. Opposition within the country is simply not tolerated, and the Iraqi opposition in exile has been rendered ineffective by the multiplicity of parties (as least 85 according to a US State Department list). Acrimonious exchanges between the various groups suggest they hate each other almost as much as they hate the regime.[5]

In the West, the public are led to believe that everything that is happening – or at least everything that is allowed to reach their ears – is the fault of the Iraqi regime; or more specifically, of President Saddam Hussein, who since the Gulf War has become the man the world most loves to hate. He is portrayed as a ruthless monster, a dictator who murders his own people by the thousand, and stockpiles food and medicines rather than feed his starving people. There seems little truth in the last allegation (see page 20) but it is clear that the regime – and it is the regime, not just the President – brooks no dissent and punishes those who speak out with imprisonment or execution. This has been presented as a targeting of minorities. It is not. The Government in general allows its minorities – including



NIKKI VAN DER GAAG

Blasted land: the remains of a flock of sheep and a sheepdog, killed along with a family of six by a US pilot on 30 April.

the Kurds (see page 24) – more freedom to practise their religion and culture than any other Middle Eastern government, so long as they are not seen as a threat because of their national aspirations. Those who are seen as such a threat are simply not tolerated. Amnesty International in its 1999 Annual Report finds the regime guilty of 'torture and ill-treatment of prisoners and detainees'; hundreds of executions and thousands 'disappeared'; a record that echoes that of many other dictatorial governments in other parts of the world.

And yet prior to the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein was seen as a good guy, armed and supported by the West in the Iran-Iraq War. Even after the chemical bombardment of the Kurds in the town of Halabja in 1988, the US Commerce Department continued to export military equipment to Iraq – including chemicals necessary for the manufacture of nerve gas.[6] Military regimes such as Iraq's are in many ways a product of the West, born of the Cold War when proxy battles were fought throughout the Majority World and dictators spawned with the firepower to keep a tight and often repressive hold on their own people and to freely implement their masters' desires. The West also fears Islam. After the Iranian Revolution, it supported Iraq as one way of keeping the Shi'a regime there in check.

Prior to the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein was seen as a good guy, armed and supported by the West

But Western alliances have a habit of changing when it suits other strategic objectives, as Tariq Aziz, Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, points out: 'You know, 12 years ago, when I was received in Washington at the White House; Yasser Arafat was a terrorist. Former terrorists in Northern Ireland are now received in Washington and London. But now our specification as an ally has changed, and Iraq is the monster, the terrorist'.[7]

Inside the country many people point to the undoubted development that took place under Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s when Iraq was a prosperous country despite the crippling Iran-Iraq war.

Between 1984 and 1989 Iraqis were on average eating about 3,372 calories a day (compared with a minimum requirement of 2,100). Adult literacy had risen to 95 per cent (Iraq won the UNESCO prize for literacy three years in a row); 92 per cent of the population had access to safe water and 93 per cent access to a clinic or hospital. Both education and health were free and Iraq's welfare system was 'one of the most comprehensive and generous in the Arab world'.[8]

So was its aid programme. Iraq prided itself on the support it gave to countries in need and the important role it played in the power balance of the Middle East. Economic rights were a priority, civil liberties were not. Now the Iraqi people have neither.

Sanctions were originally imposed by the UN on 6 August 1990 – before the Gulf War – to get the Iraqis out of Kuwait. So why weren't they lifted after this was achieved militarily?

The regime refuses to comply with UN resolutions, says the West. But the US has at various points tied the sanctions to the continued rule of Saddam Hussein – not inspections or disarmament. Conditions for the lifting of sanctions have now been made so complex that they are almost impossible to comply with. Not surprisingly, people in Iraq are pessimistic, and believe US motives to be tying Iraq's hands as a political force in the region and keeping Iraqi oil off a volatile market.

In 1996 American journalist Lesley Stahl pointed out to Madeleine Albright, then US Ambassador to the UN, that half a million children were reputed to have died: 'that's more children than died in Hiroshima. Is the price worth it?' Albright did not question the figures but replied 'I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it.'[9]

When I thank Nasra before leaving, she replies bluntly; 'I don't talk to you for your sake, but for the sake of my country.' Her grandfather's pride and passion for Iraq is never far beneath the surface. 'You know', she smiles quietly to herself, 'I was asked the other day by another foreigner: "What should I tell people when they ask me: 'Why haven't the Iraqi people risen up against Saddam Hussein?' I told him to tell them that the Iraqi people are perfectly capable of sorting out our own affairs. "'Tell them," I said, "tell them to mind their own business. Lift sanctions and let us rebuild our country."' ■

Six steps to ending the deadlock

◆ The US and Britain should stop the illegal bombing of Iraq immediately.

◆ The UN should lift the sanctions – with the exception of military hardware.

◆ Once the sanctions are lifted, Iraq needs to be given support from the UN and the international community in order to rebuild on all fronts – the equivalent of a Marshall Plan.

◆ Iraq should have the debts that it is paying under the Compensation Fund – at present at least 30 per cent of oil sold under the Oil-for-Food deal – suspended and reduced until such time as it can afford to pay.

◆ There should be a ban on the sale of arms to Iraq – as 80% of arms were sold by the five permanent members of the UN this should not be difficult to enforce. International monitors should return to ensure that weapons of mass destruction are not being built.

◆ A UN multilateral or unilateral guarantee of frontiers to prevent further invasions is already in place – but does not cover Turkish incursions into northern Iraq. Kuwait has signed defence treaties with the five permanent members of the UN and others. There is also a big US army presence both on Kuwaiti soil and in the region, preventing any aggression on Iraq's part.

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1 *The Independent* October 15 1998 **2** *State of the World's Children 1999*, UNICEF. **3** Except for two weeks in March and a few days in May. **4** Language reminiscent of the Gulf War and more recently of the war against Serbia. Death and destruction become 'collateral damage'; the war a 'just war'. **5** Material on the opposition supplied by Karen Dabrowska. In December 1998 the US Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, making $97 million available to the opposition. But many parties refused to have any part in this, fearing that the opposition could become no more than a mouthpiece in the service of American foreign policy. **6** *The Gulf Between Us: the Gulf War and beyond* edited by Victoria Brittain (Virago 1991). **7** In *Middle East International*, 21 May 1999. **8** Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme, quoted in *Starving Iraq* (Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq, 1999). **9** Interview on CBS's *60 Minutes*, 12 May 1996.

Arguments Against the Bombing

consider the infinite fragility of an infant's skull
how the bones lie soft and open
only time knitting them shut

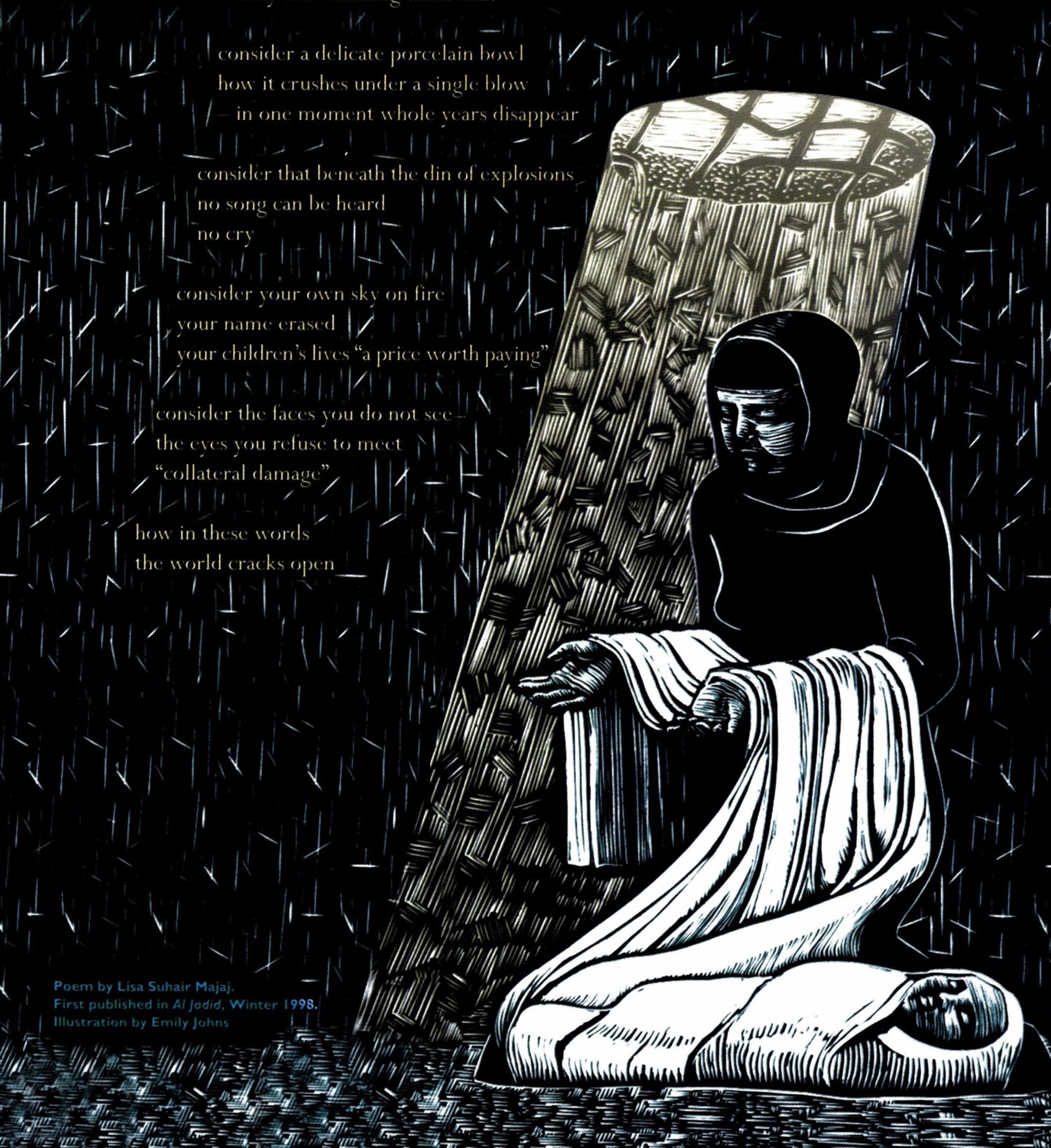
consider a delicate porcelain bowl
how it crushes under a single blow
– in one moment whole years disappear

consider that beneath the din of explosions
no song can be heard
no cry

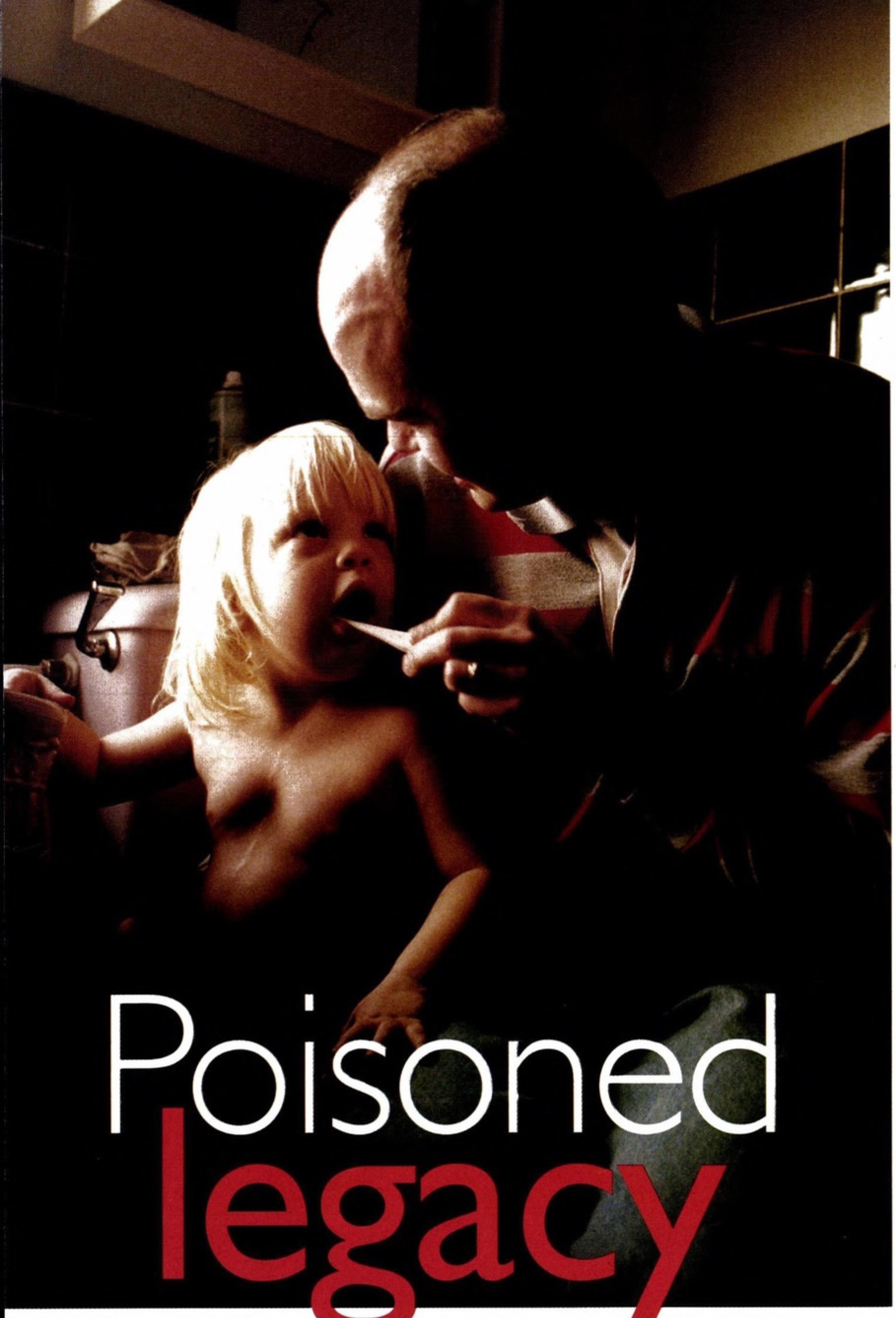
consider your own sky on fire
your name erased
your children's lives "a price worth paying"

consider the faces you do not see
the eyes you refuse to meet
"collateral damage"

how in these words
the world cracks open



Poem by Lisa Suhair Majaj.
First published in *Al Jadid*, Winter 1998.
Illustration by Emily Johns



KAREN ROBINSON

Poisoned legacy

Felicity Arbuthnot investigates the worldwide spread of cancers and deformities since the Gulf War.

MORE ordnance was rained down on Iraq during the six weeks of the Gulf War than was dropped in the whole of World War Two. Unknown to the public or the Allied troops at the time, much of it was coated with depleted uranium (DU). This nuclear waste has replaced titanium as a cheap coating for weapons which can pierce armour. It burns on contact, producing a fine dust which can be ingested and inhaled and which enters the food chain via water and soil.

'The risks associated with DU are both chemical and radiological' states the US Army's Environmental Policy Institute, emphasizing that as a 'low-level radioactive waste' it 'must be deposited in a licensed repository' and that 'inhaled insoluble oxides stay in the lungs and pose a potential cancer risk.'[1] Radioactivity only begins to diminish after 4,500 million years.

In 1990 the UK's Atomic Energy Authority sent a report to the British Government, estimating that if 50 tonnes were left in the Gulf area should there be a war, then these would lead to an estimated 50,000 extra cancer deaths in a decade. Experts now estimate that there may be 900 tonnes remaining, travelling where the wind blows.[2]

By early 1992, doctors in Iraq were bewildered by the rise in birth deformities – some so grotesque and unusual that they expected to see them only in textbooks and perhaps once or twice in a lifetime. They compared them to those recorded in the Pacific islands after the nuclear testing in the 1950s. Cancers too were rising, especially amongst the young; the most susceptible to radiation.

It was not until 1993 that the fact that DU had been used in the Gulf War began to emerge. Concerns were countered by Washington and Whitehall along the lines of 'no immediate danger' and 'only very, very mildly radioactive.'[3] This was despite the fact that tanks returned to the US from the Gulf War were immediately transported to the nuclear decontamination facility at Barnwell, North Carolina.[4]

In Iraq, children were (and are) collecting fragments of bullets or missiles as a way of coming to terms with the war. They bring them home or take them to school for display. Professor Seigwart Horst Guenther, scientist, founder of the American Yellow Cross and Director of the Albert Schweitzer Institute, collected one such bullet from Basra in southern Iraq for analysis and transported it to Germany – correctly encased in a radiation-proof lead box. On arrival at Berlin airport he was promptly arrested for transporting radioactive material – it had activated all the radiation sensors.

Among those soldiers returning from the Gulf War alarming symptoms appeared almost immediately. Eddie Blanche, from Newcastle in northern England, had been an army fitness instructor, passed 'A1-fit' immediately prior to action in the Gulf.

'I ran 30 kilometres with a 15-kilo pack on my back. I went there a physical specialist and came back a physical wreck,' he says wryly, his sense of humour still intact. He has lost the sight of one eye, can walk only for short distances – with the shortest of breath – and suffers agonising joint pains. The exhaustion of even talking shows after minutes, his face bathed in perspiration.

In the US over one-third of the 600,000 veterans deployed in the Gulf have sought help from Veterans' Administration hospitals; in Britain 8,000 of the 29,000 troops are ill and over 400 have died.[5] In May 1999, a coroner in the north of England stated that he dealt with one case a week of Gulf War veterans committing suicide.[6] In Australia, Canada and New Zealand similar scenarios are being recorded.

A study of cancers and leukaemias among 1,400 Iraqi soldiers who had been in the heavily bombarded area around the southern town of Basra showed chilling increases; for example, ten cases of lymphomas in 1991 and 106 in 1996. Brain cancer too showed a startling rise; one case in 1991 and 40 in 1996.

These statistics are the reality for many. When Amy West's husband returned safely from the Gulf to their US home in small-town Mississippi, they decided to celebrate by having another baby. Their daughter was born with a rare lung condition, Goldenhar's Syndrome. Shortly afterwards Amy heard of babies born to two other veteran's wives with the same condition. She spent a year, nightly, after work, tracing and phoning those in the same town who had been in the Gulf. Had they had a baby since? If so, was it healthy? Out of 251 families with new babies, 67 per cent had congenital abnormalities; ears, eyes or fingers missing, severe blood diseases or respiratory problems. Compiled with the help of the family doctor, an old friend who had known Amy since childhood, she sent her findings to the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War illnesses. They were rejected by the Convenor, Bernard Rostker, as 'unscientific'. The doctor told Amy that he was very sorry and very embarrassed, but he could no longer work with her. He was equally sorry that he was unable to tell her why.[8]

Professor Asaf Durakovic (see the interview in **NI 305**) would perhaps have had an answer as to why. He is one of the world's leading experts on radiation, and sees a familiar pattern. 'Any doctor who becomes involved in this subject is pressurized, fired; records and samples go missing...' Durakovic was 'horrified' when he learned that DU had been used in the Gulf and wrote to President Clinton in February 1997: 'I am bringing to your attention the conspiracy against Gulf veterans of the United States.' Shortly afterwards his senior position at the Department of Nuclear Medicine at the Veterans' Administration Authority in Wilmington, Delaware, was terminated.

Ray Bristow, of the British Gulf Veterans and Families' Association, echoes Durakovic: 'Dosimeters (which read radiation levels) issued to troops were at first denied as being issued at all, then we were told the records were lost, then that the readings were all normal – but no-one was allowed to see them. Medical records of Gulf War vets regularly go missing.'

Bristow served as a medical technician with the 32nd Field Hospital in Saudi Arabia and is one of the many ill veterans to put pressure on the British Medical Assessment Programme (MAP), established by the Ministry of Defence in response to Gulf War illness, to test for DU.

On 17 January 1998, the seventh anniversary of the start of the Gulf War, he and other seriously ill veterans returned their medals to protest at their plight. In December 1998, together with Dr Colin Purcell Lee, another sick Gulf veteran, he took a momentous decision: they would go to an international conference entitled 'Health and Environmental Consequences of Depleted Uranium used by the US and British forces in the 1991 Gulf War.' The place? Baghdad.

Both brush off the journey, gruelling even for the fittest, and taken at inestimable cost to the seriously ill. Colin Purcell Lee describes one desperately sick Iraqi colonel: 'He clearly did not have long to go; we put our arms around each other and just held on. It was healing for both of us.' Says Bristow: 'To think that I had to go to Iraq to discover what was wrong with me, only to find it mirrored there.' He recounts standing in a hospital, waiting to be interviewed by the BBC, at last able to bring the plight of Gulf War victims to the eyes of the world.

'I am a medic, trained to react with practicality, not emotion; I was surrounded by children dying of leukaemias and cancers who had access to no or minimal treatment and all I could do was cry uncontrollably. So there was no interview, no publicity for us or for those suffering in Iraq.'

Until recently cancer medication was vetoed as 'dual use' by the Sanctions Committee – because it contained minute traces of radiation.

Bristow and Purcell Lee arrived home 'to find we had been called traitors by a senior Cabinet Minister' and that their homes had been raided by Ministry of Defence Police. All computers, discs and files had been removed in search of a document which showed that the Medical Director of MAP was liaising with Porton Down Chemical Weapons Establishment over concern that DU was a contributory cause of the veterans' plight. For eight years MAP refused to countenance such a scenario and were still denying it to the veterans themselves. In June this year, when the plight of Australian Gulf veterans was commanding extensive media coverage, all computer discs and files relating to Gulf War illnesses were stolen from the home of campaigner Philip Steele. Nothing else was missing.

In March this year, sick veterans from Canada, the US, the UK and Iraq sent urine samples to be tested for DU to highly respected Professor Hari Sharma, Professor Emeritus in Chemistry at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, in Canada. The results were astonishing. All were positive, and some, including Ray Bristow, had readings of over 100 times the 'safe' limit in their bodies. So did Terry Riordan, who received his results on Wednesday 28 April. He was the first Canadian veteran to be tested by Sharma. Riordan and his wife Sue had run up debts of $100,000 for medication and in order to prove that the cause of his debilitating illness was exposure to radiation in the Gulf War. On Thursday the 29 April, Riordan died. The death certificate recorded his death as due to 'Gulf War Syndrome'. He donated his body to the Gulf veterans for tissue testing.

All the results were positive, and some had readings of over 100 times the 'safe' limit

Sharma, who had never been involved in a campaign before, wrote to NATO and the heads of state of all countries with DU weapons, 'begging' them to withdraw them from their country's arsenals and condemning DU as a 'crime against humanity'. Sharma also predicted that were his results representative, 'a conservative estimate – and I stress conservative' is that there would be 36,000 extra cancer deaths amongst Gulf War veterans. Sharma has been withdrawn from any further DU testing. Coincidentally, the Ministry of Defence in Britain announced shortly afterwards that MAP would, after all, test veterans for DU.

In August 1996 the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights had designated DU as a weapon of mass destruction along with napalm, fuel air-bombs, and cluster bombs. Depleted uranium was used in Bosnia in 1995 and cancers had risen threefold by 1997. DU weapons were extensively used in the recent war in the Balkans. Radiation readings in Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece have recorded air samples exceeding by 40 times

Children of Gulf veterans: (left) Jennifer Olding with her father – she has heart and eye defects, retarded growth and development, bone abnormalities and facial palsy. Immediately above are Amy West and her daughters. The younger one suffers from Goldenhar's Syndrome.

FELICITY ARBUTHNOT

the recommended safety limit of radiation associated with DU. The British Ministry of Defence points out that Armed Forces Minister Douglas Henderson had given strict instructions that no troops were to approach any target which might have been hit by DU unless they were wearing protective clothing against radiation. Asked about the problem of the people living in and returning to the region, the Ministry of Defence said that was for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to resolve. DU weapons have now been sold to 17 countries.

If cancers continue on their present upward curve, they will affect 44 per cent of the population within ten years

In Iraq, which has had nine years to feel the full effects of DU, cancers have risen up to tenfold. Dr Huda Ammash, an environmental biologist at Baghdad University, who obtained her PhD from the University of Missouri, calculates that 'the prolonged effect of this (radiation) is, over a period of more than ten years, equal to 100 Chernobyls.'[9]

In Basra, radiation levels in flora and fauna have reached 84 times the World Health Organization's recommended safe limit. Here, the unimaginable can be found. Dr Jenan Ali at Basra General Hospital in southern Iraq has a photographic record of all the babies born with no eyes, brains, limbs, genitalia; internal organs on the outside; grotesquely deformed little heads and bodies.

In Mosul in northern Iraq, studies undertaken by four universities show a fivefold increase in cancers after 1991.[10] An informal survey in the area counted 20 malformed babies in 160 houses; the majority of fathers had served in the Gulf War. US journalist Barbara Namim Aziz reports a farmer remarking that there were fewer marriages as a result: 'Young people fear the birth of malformed foetuses and still births...we look around our village, everyone knows couples who have had deformed babies.'

Soaring cancers in Iraq since the Gulf War are well documented. Less so is the human cost – the beds occupied by small figures one day, eloquently empty on return. I remember Esra, in the Al Mansour Children's Hospital in Baghdad, frail, beautiful, 17 years old – old enough to know she was dying. Cancer had mostly paralysed her central nervous system, but did not prevent her crying. She had been crying for three weeks – she wanted to be well, go home, continue her studies, and, most of all, to live. Jassim, the boy who dreamed of being a poet (**NI 309**) will haunt for all time.

Ali Maksoud, aged two, did not even get a bed in hospital. 'This patient is beyond help, there is nothing we can do,' said Dr Selma Al Haddad, oncologist at Al Mansour. Formerly he would have had palliative care, but beds and resources are now for the slimmest of chances, not the small no-hopers. Outside the hospital, leaning against one of the great white pillars at the entrance, his mother sat on the ground, Ali clutched to her under her black *abaya*; her tears falling on his small, still face.

It is estimated that if cancers continue on the present upward curve, 44 per cent of the population will develop cancer within ten years.[11]

'In embarking upon a course, always consider the seventh generation' goes an American Indian saying. Unless we heed their words, there may not even be a third. ■

Felicity Arbuthnot is a freelance journalist specializing in social and environmental issues with a special knowledge of Iraq. She is writing a book on the plight of those affected by the Gulf War.

Esra, aged 17, old enough to know she is dying of cancer.

KAREN ROBINSON / FORMAT

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1 *Health and Environment Consequences of Depleted Uranium in the US Army*, June 1995. **2** *Military Toxics Program.* **3** The hazards of uranium have been known for centuries. Cancers and birth deformities amongst uranium workers and miners from New Mexico to Namibia and Canada to China have been the subject of ongoing studies. **4** *International Herald Tribune* 25 April 1992. **5** Armed Forces Minister Lord Gilbert. **6** *Hull Daily Mail.* **7** *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 June 1999. **8** Interview with the author. **9** *Metal of Dishonour*, International Action Centre, 1997. **10** Paper by Professor MM Al-Jebouri, University of Tikrit, December 1998. **11** Johns Hopkins University and paper presented by Professor Mikdem M Saleh in Baghdad, December 1998.

By the rivers of Babylon

Nikki van der Gaag gets a rare glimpse of the temples and palaces of ancient Iraq, all closed since the Gulf War.

It is easy to forget the other Iraq; the ancient land of Mesopotamia. And yet here is a place which inhabits the collective psyche of the West. A land where the Garden of Eden mythically bloomed. Nineveh, where Jonah is reputed to be buried. The site of Babylon, home to the Tower of Babel, whose Hanging Gardens were one of the World's Seven Wonders. Here the Tigris and the Euphrates flow; the city of Ur dates back 6,000 years, and people still visit the tomb of St Matthew, hoping for a cure to what ails them.

So many of these places I had always imagined to be purely mythical, and yet here they were, in solid rock and stone, colours shimmering in the blazing heat. The Ishtar Gate at Babylon (see contents page) is perhaps the brightest of all. Bluer than a midsummer sky, the white daisies and golden dragons – part snake, part lion and part eagle – stand in sharp relief next to waving palm trees.

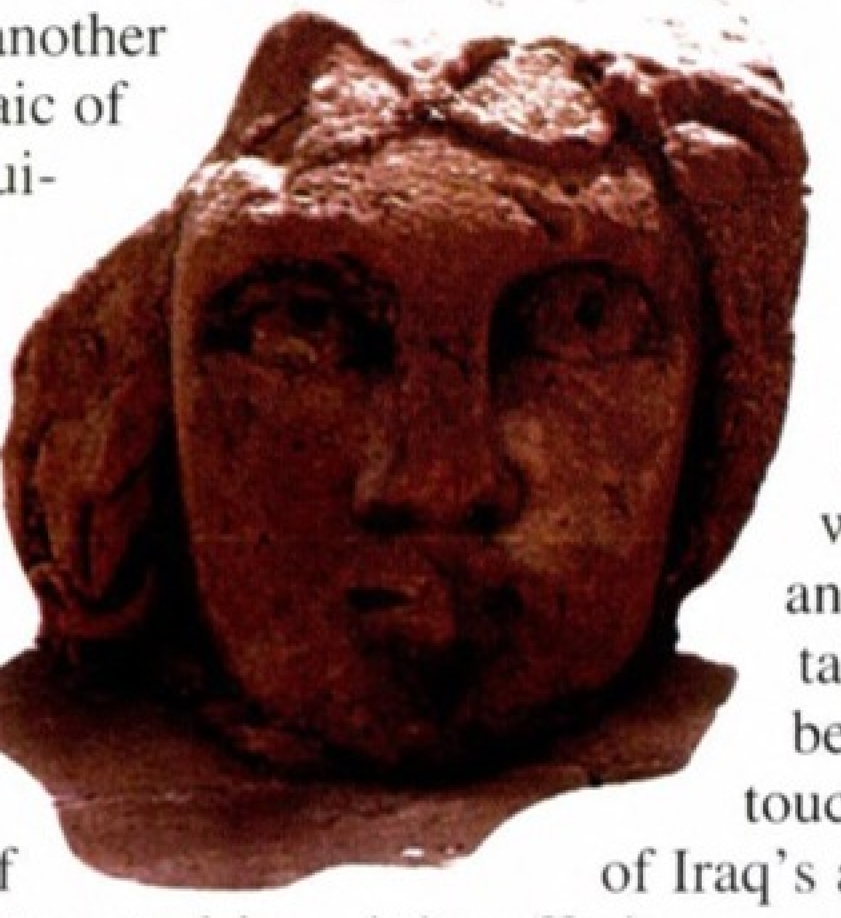
Our guide, Muhammad, greets us just inside the gate in a small dusty shop full of postcards. He is an asthmatic archaeologist, whose knowledge is as extensive as his breath is short. He takes us into the cool of a museum where all the glass cases lie empty, but on the wall is another bright display; an immense mosaic of the Lion of Babylon with ubiquitous daisies smiling up from under its feet.

'The cases are empty', says Muhammad apologetically, 'because we have had to remove everything in case of bombing.' I find out later that many antiquities, including Hatra, and the golden mosque at Kerbala, one of Islam's most holy places, were targeted in the Gulf War. Now much of it is in safekeeping in Baghdad.

We stand in front of the lion, which covers all of one wall. 'This is just one panel,' points out Muhammad. 'We have two in Iraq – but there are more than 100 in Germany. You see, when the Germans excavated this site at the beginning of the century, they transported everything back to Berlin.' He looks resigned but hopeful. 'Perhaps you could say that we would like them back.' And he wipes his brow with a white handkerchief and leads us on into the scorching sunshine (it was 47°C that day) to the ruins of the Hanging Gardens and the rest of Nebuchadnezzar's palace.

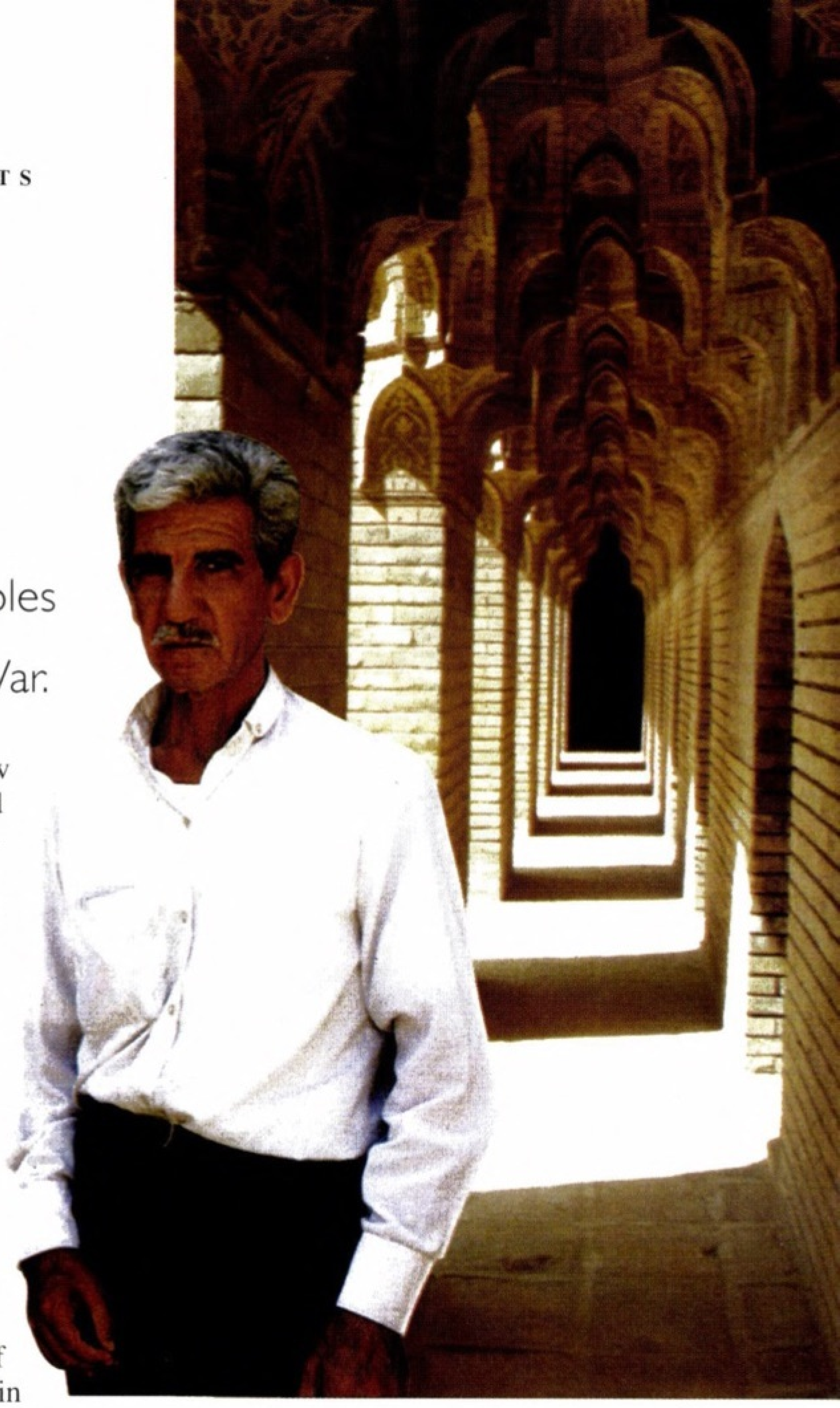
Muhammad points out that much of the palace was reconstructed by the Government in the 1980s. 'But underneath we have preserved all the ancient ruins,' he says proudly. I'm not at all sure what I think about such reconstruction, but there is no mistaking the care and pride with which it has been undertaken.

Later, we visit the ancient city of Hatra, near Mosul, which was built in the third century BC. Hatra formed part of a chain of cities including Palmyra in Syria, Petra in Jordan and Baalbeck in Lebanon. You can see Hatra from many miles away, a vast neglected ruin in the endless desert. A rusty crane hangs over a temple with carved eagles and a stone Medusa (below). Here too, everything stopped ten years ago. Neat piles of his exquisitely carved stones lie on the ground still waiting to be sorted.



Before we leave, I ask Adnan if I can take a photo and he agrees, but adds embarrassedly that he would prefer me not to take his shoes. I look down. They are white sandals, broken and showing his toes. So I take a photo of him behind a stone block. I am touched by yet another sign of Iraq's anxiety not to show how it is suffering.

At the Abbasid palace in Baghdad, our guide Nuri Abbas cannot hide his pain, clearly physical as well as mental. His face is dark with sadness and his left arm hangs strangely. But the empty palace works its magic and for a time we forget to ask him his story. We explore the spacious courtyards, and examine in wonder the intricately carved arches and ceilings. It is believed to have been built at the end of the twelfth century by Caliph Al-Naser Lidinillah. The upper floor is a series of tiny rooms which housed his harem. Inside the light slants through the ceilings, giving a mysterious quality and in the silence and the heat it is easy to imagine ancient rulers slipping along its passages.



Nuri Abbas, guide at the Abbasid palace, was wounded by a bomb in December

NIKKI VAN DER GAAG

Then in one room we see broken stones, neatly placed in a pile. They are all carved with Arabic writing. When we ask Nuri Abbas about them, the reason for his pain becomes clear.

Silent until now, the words seem to drag themselves out of him. 'It was the bombing which destroyed this. And all the glass in the windows.' He takes us back to the front door which I had noticed had been patched with corrugated iron on one side. 'This door too. Last December. I was sitting here outside with two friends when it happened. I was wounded.' He looks at us despairingly; each word seems an effort. Yet as we leave the palace he raises his good arm wearily in a gesture of farewell.

As we leave, Felicity quotes a James Elroy Flecker poem about the plundered statues in the British Museum in London:

> 'There is a hall in Bloomsbury that
> no more dare I tread,
> For all the stone men shout at me
> and swear they are not dead.
> And once I touched a broken girl and
> knew that marble bled.' ■

Secrets and spies

Ian Williams speaks to **Scott Ritter**, former UN weapons inspector.

In April 1991 the United Nations set up UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission) in order to ensure that Iraq disclosed and disarmed all its weapons of mass destruction in the aftermath of the Gulf War. It was to have 'full access' but also take into account Iraq's 'sovereignty, dignity and national security concerns'. In the years that followed Iraq was substantially disarmed, but then came a series of accusations and counter-accusations between UNSCOM and Iraq. These resulted first in the resignation of Scott Ritter, one of UNSCOM's key weapons inspectors, and finally in the suspension and expulsion of the organization amid revelations of spying by the CIA. It was this that triggered the bombings in December 1998 by the US and Britain.

UNTIL his resignation last summer William 'Scott' Ritter was known as the toughest of the UNSCOM inspectors who scoured Iraq for Saddam Hussein's programme of weapons of mass destruction. Ritter joined UNSCOM in 1991 when he left the US Marines where he had been involved in arms-control work and inspections in Russia. He eventually resigned amid much publicity: 'when it became clear that the US and Richard Butler, Executive Director of UNSCOM, were manipulating inspections as a vehicle for maintaining economic sanctions, instead of disarmament. I could not be part of that. My job was to find the weapons.'

Butler, he says, 'stopped being a man objectively carrying out the will of the Security Council and became a man who carried out the will of the US and the UK. And when you enter that kind of buddy-buddy relationship, you give them the green light to misuse and abuse the relationship with UNSCOM.'

There was always a tightrope to walk – and he maintains that while Butler's predecessor, Rolf Ekeus, could balance, Butler fell off. Ritter alleges that Butler's fatal mistake was thinking that he could succeed where Ekeus had failed.

UNSCOM foundered on accusations – later proved to be accurate – that US Intelligence Services used it to spy on Iraq for purposes unrelated to its disarmament mission. Ritter himself was at the centre of this debate as he was in charge of the Concealment Inspection Unit which secretly installed listening devices to intercept Iraqi communications. He was also responsible for liaison with Israel. For many observers its relationship with Israel was one of UNSCOM's fatal political mistakes. Many Arabs compared the relentless application of UN Resolution 687 in Iraq with Israel's perennial defiance of the Security Council over the Palestinian territories and Lebanon. Many also felt that Israel's nuclear capability justified Iraq's weapons programme. Ritter admits that: 'Everybody knew it was politically dangerous,' but, he says, although 'everyone knew that the Iraqis were lying back in 1992 and 1993, we were missing hard leads. On the other hand, if UNSCOM wrote a report favourable to Iraq, then there was no way that the Israelis would allow the Americans to accept it.'

'By going to Israel we not only got information, we co-opted them. We made Israel buy into the UNSCOM machine. By following up every Israeli lead, we made sure that when the time came the Israelis couldn't say "boo!" I'm the one that went over to set up the relationship, and I'm telling you, we were in charge. The Israelis were supporting us, not the other way round. They knew that it was in their interests for UNSCOM to succeed and they knew that if anything came out badly, it would affect the work.'

Ritter explains part of the problem with Butler as insecurity of tenure. Ekeus was a Swedish diplomat, paid for by Stockholm and seconded to the UN. Canberra refused such an arrangement for the Australian Butler, who was in fact the choice of Ekeus rather than Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General. 'So the US stepped in and brokered a deal. The Australians deposited the money with the US who passed it on to a secret bank account where cheques were cut in the name of the UN. So Butler was in the pocket of the US from the beginning. He became very much aware that Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State, could make or break him – he spoke about it often.'

Which is why, Ritter claims, Butler did not speak out when Albright stated in March 1997 with her statement that the sanctions stayed until Saddam Hussein went. 'She basically destroyed the credibility of UNSCOM, and took away any hope that Iraq would ever comply. UNSCOM became the problem for the US and they set out to destroy it. Now it's gone.'

So how successful was UNSCOM? 'In terms of 100 per cent disarmament, we didn't succeed. But what has been disarmed is a very high percentage – over 90 per cent.

'Take chemical weapons. There's a real possibility that Iraq still has five hundred 155-mm mustard shells. But militarily that's nothing. To have an effect on the battlefield you need tens of thousands. A few years ago it had a major plant making chemical weapons. It does not today. The same goes for the biological, nuclear and ballistic programs.'

What the Iraqis did, he claims, is 'hold on to just enough to allow reconstruction. We were going after the seed stock that would enable Iraq to reconstitute its weapons programme. What the world should be doing to solve this problem is getting inspectors in, not to hunt down this seed stock, but rather to prevent them from using it.

The US should acknowledge, even if only to themselves, that they screwed up, and the only way is to pass another resolution redefining Iraq's standards for compliance. The world has a responsibility to lift sanctions, trading off lifting them for an inspection team that would monitor quantitative as opposed to qualitative compliance.'

That can only be done through diplomacy, he states, but adds, 'How can you negotiate with a regime that you are trying to overthrow? There's no way that the opposition will topple Saddam. I think there's little chance of assassination, so the US tumbles yet again into a quagmire that requires Iraq to be contained economically and militarily.'

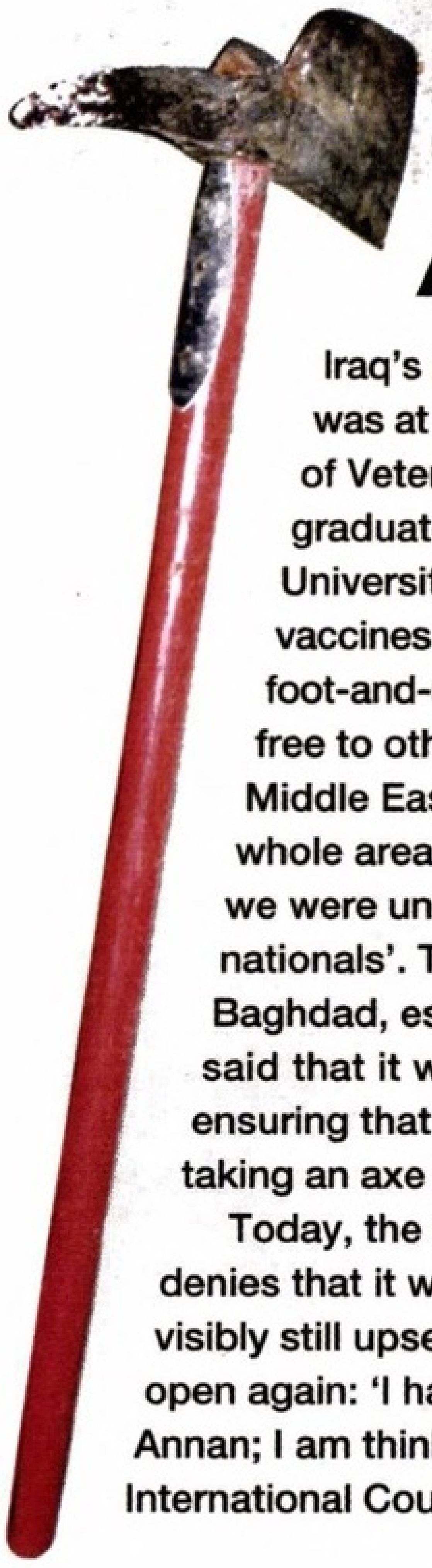
Calmly but with feeling, the ex-Marine admitted, 'For myself, I hate sanctions, I think they're counterproductive, not effective, and they target the wrong part of the population. I was in charge of looking at the Security Apparatus, the Presidency, so I knew damn well that sanctions weren't affecting them.'

His own resignation put him in a career quagmire. For upsetting the Clinton Administration he could have posed as a patriotic Marine martyr for the right wing – but he was not saying what they wanted to hear, as he ruefully admits. 'I've burnt my bridges with the Government and everyone else.' He does not expect an invitation to join the Council on Foreign Relations, the home which Richard Butler has found now UNSCOM is finished.

This does not prevent Ritter from feeling pride for what UNSCOM accomplished. 'It was a fine organization. One of the finest the United Nations was ever able to cobble together. We believed in our job. We spent more time confronting the US than anyone else. We were nobody's tools, but implementers of Security Council mandates.' Now, he says, 'There's no realistic hope for its revival.' And as UNSCOM slips into irrelevance, Iraq goes sanctioned but uninspected. ■

Ritter's book *Endgame: Solving the Iraq Problem - once and for all*; published by Simon & Schuster, 1999.

Ian Williams is United Nations correspondent for *The Nation* and *Middle East International*, and author of the *UN for beginners*.



Axing the factory

Iraq's main French-built veterinary medicines factory was built in 1982. 'It was at that time one of only four of its kind in the world,' says the Director of Veterinary Services, Dr Fadal Abbas Jassem, a graduate of Edinburgh University. 'Iraq was supplying vaccines for diseases such as foot-and-mouth at cost price or free to other countries in the Middle East. It was vital for the whole area. And what is more, we were undercutting the multinationals'. The factory, near Baghdad, escaped the bombing during the Gulf War. Then in 1996 UNSCOM said that it was producing chemical weapons and set about systematically ensuring that it would never operate again; blocking pipes with concrete, taking an axe to the air-conditioning, and a blow torch to the two autoclaves.

Today, the place is derelict and dismal. Dr Jassem denies that it was ever a chemical-weapons factory. He is visibly still upset but also determined that one day it will open again: 'I have sent a letter of complaint to Kofi Annan; I am thinking of putting a case before the International Court in the Hague. I will never give up.'

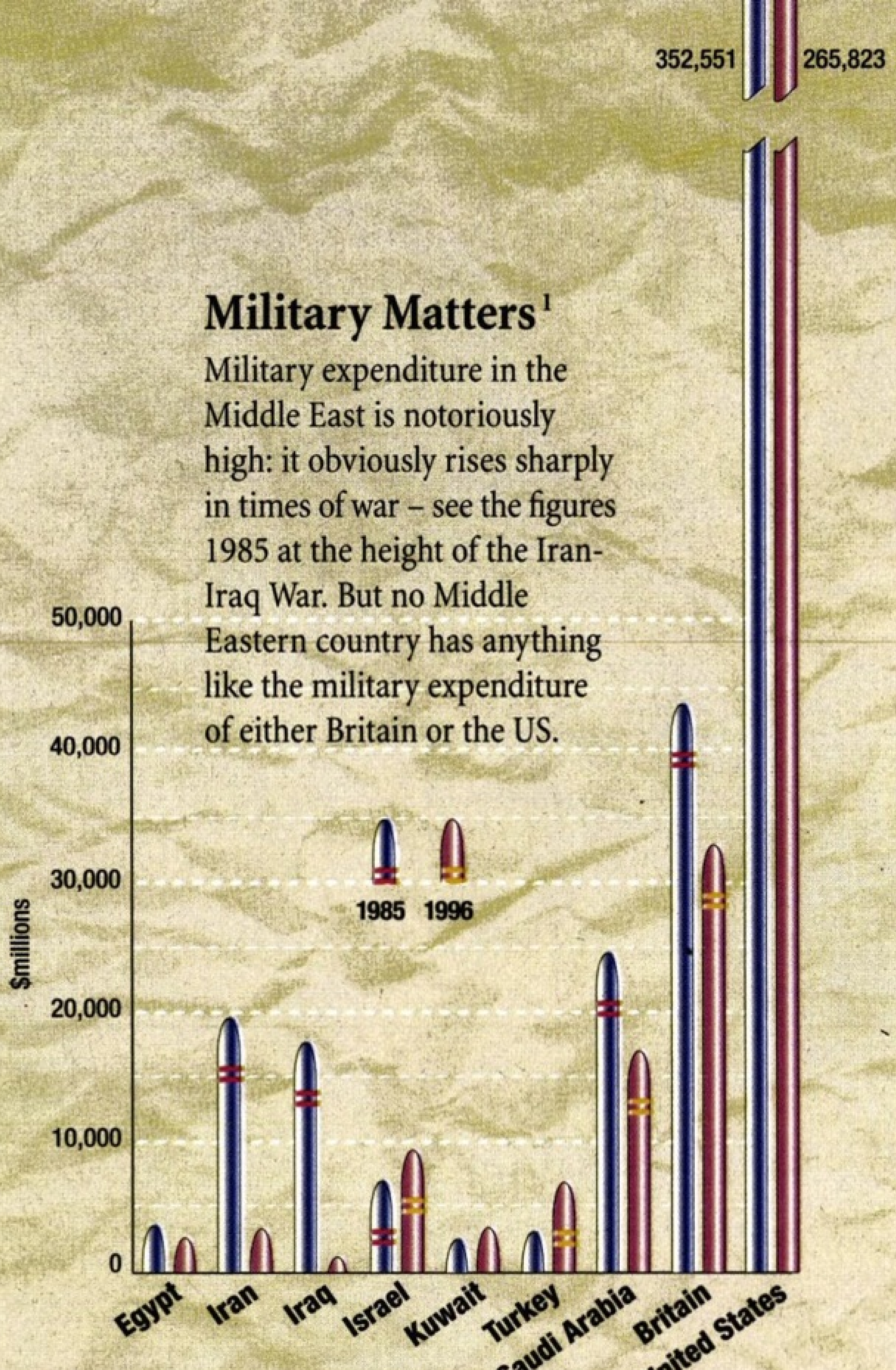
Nikki van der Gaag

المؤسسة العامة لتنمية الثروة الحيوانية
دائرة الصحة الحيوانية
قسم الحمى القلاعية
GENERAL ESTABLISHMENT FOR ANIMAL DEVELOPMENT
ANIMAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT
F.M.D VACCINE PRODUCTION LABORATORY

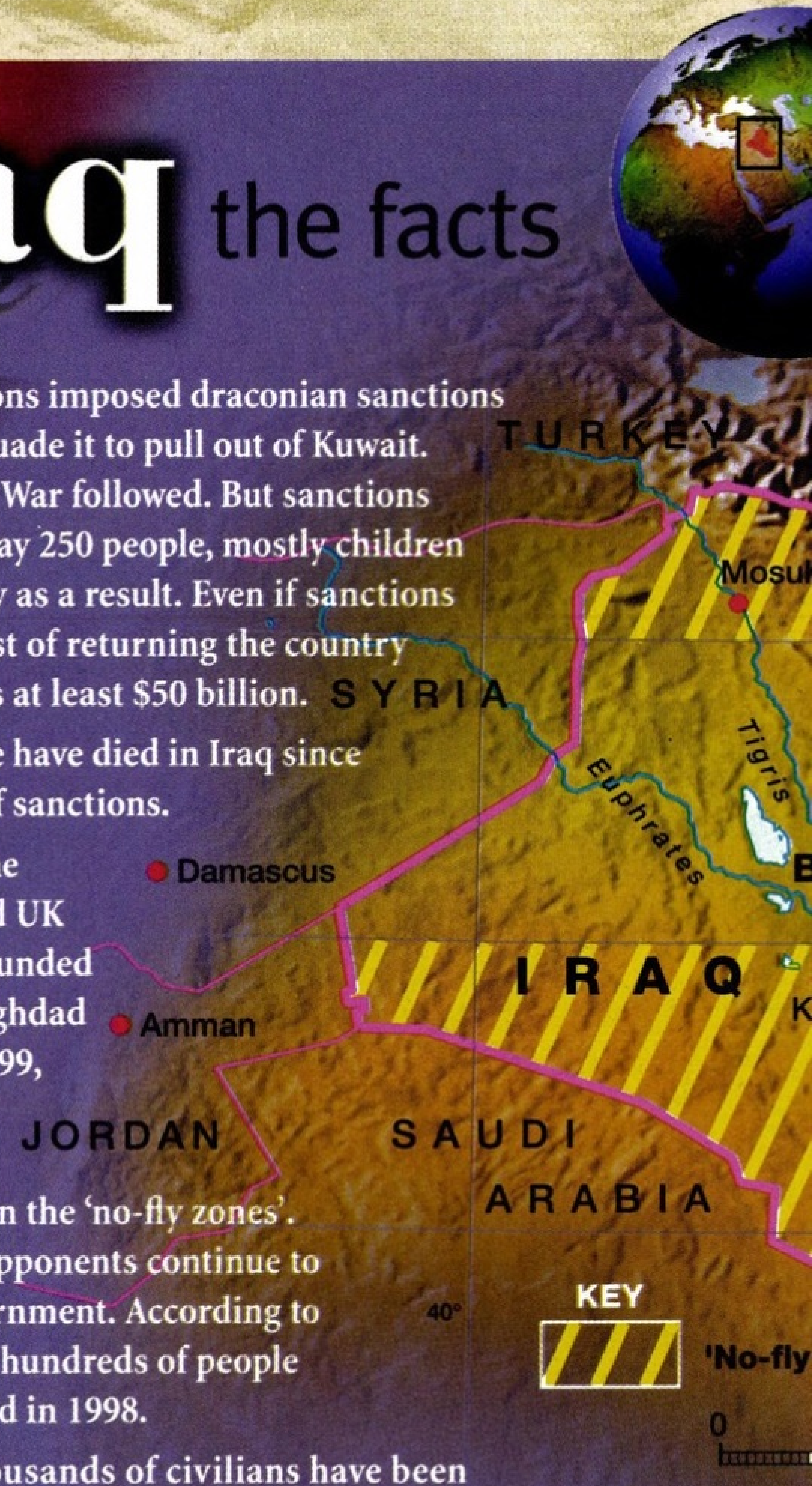
NIKKI VAN DER GAAG

Military Matters[1]

Military expenditure in the Middle East is notoriously high: it obviously rises sharply in times of war – see the figures 1985 at the height of the Iran-Iraq War. But no Middle Eastern country has anything like the military expenditure of either Britain or the US.



Iraq the facts



In 1990 the United Nations imposed draconian sanctions on Iraq in order to persuade it to pull out of Kuwait. This failed and the Gulf War followed. But sanctions remain in place and today 250 people, mostly children under five, die every day as a result. Even if sanctions were to be lifted, the cost of returning the country to pre-1991 standards is at least $50 billion.

- Over a million people have died in Iraq since 1990 as a direct result of sanctions.
- In December 1998, the bombings by the US and UK killed 30 people and wounded 100 in one attack on Baghdad alone. Since January 1999, the US and UK have unilaterally conducted almost daily airstrikes in the 'no-fly zones'.
- Suspected political opponents continue to be arrested by the Government. According to Amnesty International, hundreds of people were reportedly executed in 1998.
- In Kurdish areas thousands of civilians have been displaced due to fighting between Iraqi, Kurdish and Turkish forces. Turkey continues to raid northern Iraq.

Sales of weapons to Iraq

Many of Iraq's weapons were sold to it by the West, even during the period after the Kurdish massacre in 1988. Before the Gulf War, Iraq was supplied by a number of countries including Russia, France, Brazil, the US and Britain. German companies sold components for purifying uranium as well as materials for Iraq's mustard and nerve gas.

Selection of weapons sales to Iraq in 1988 and 1989[4]

Weapons system	Type	Qty	Price	Country
Al Hossein	S/S missile	300	n/a	Brazil
Dauphin	Attack helicopter	6	n/a	France
AS-15-TT	Missile	n/a	n/a	France
Cymbeline mortar locating radar		n/a	$1m	Britain
Tank engines	spares	n/a	$1.5m	Britain
Encryption equipment		1,325	$11.5m	Britain
Laser rangefinder	surveillance	n/a	$14m	Britain
AS-14 Kedge	A/S missile	120	n/a	USSR
Navigation equipment		n/a	$3m	US
BK-117	Helicopter	12	n/a	W Germany

Country Profile

Population: 21.2 million (1996) 10.1 million under 18.[1]

Area: 438,317 sq km

Life expectancy: 66.1 (1993); 58.5(1997)[1]

Language: Arabic; in the Kurdish regions people speak various Kurdish dialects.

Religions: 56% of the population are Shi'a Muslims, 25% Sunni; 20% Kurdish. There is also a substantial and well integrated Christian minority, including Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz.

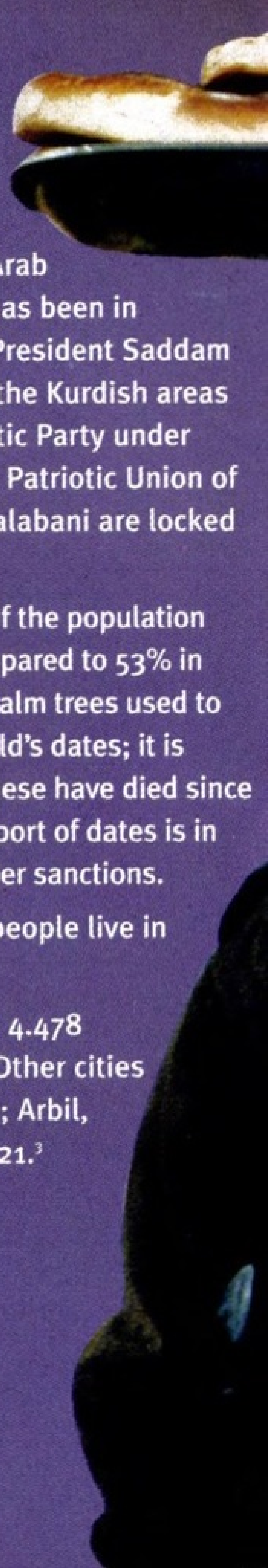
Currency: the dinar

Political parties: The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party has been in power since 1968 and President Saddam Hussein since 1979. In the Kurdish areas the Kurdistan Democratic Party under Masud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan under Jalal Talabani are locked in struggle.

Agriculture: Only 15% of the population work in agriculture, compared to 53% in 1970.[2] Iraq's 15 million palm trees used to produce 80% of the world's dates; it is estimated that half of these have died since the Gulf War and the export of dates is in any case prohibited under sanctions.

Urbanization: 75% of people live in the cities.[2]

Capital: Baghdad (left) 4.478 million people (1995). Other cities include Basra, 406,296; Arbil, 485,968; Mosul, 664,221.[3]



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1 *Human Development Report 1998* (UNDP). 2 *State of the World's Children* (UNICEF). 3 *The World Guide 1999/2000*. 4 'Middle East Defense News/Mednews' in Kenneth R Timmerman *How the West Armed Iraq* (Bantam Books). 5 Website of the International Action Center http://leb.net/IAC. 6 United Nations Report on Current Humanitarian Situation in Iraq, March 1999. 7 Kamil Mahdi *Rehabilitation prospects for the Iraqi economy*. 8 Government of Iraq (UNICEF's figures are similar if not worse). 9 Office of the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Iraq.

rbil
rkuk
36°
IRAN
ghdad
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bala
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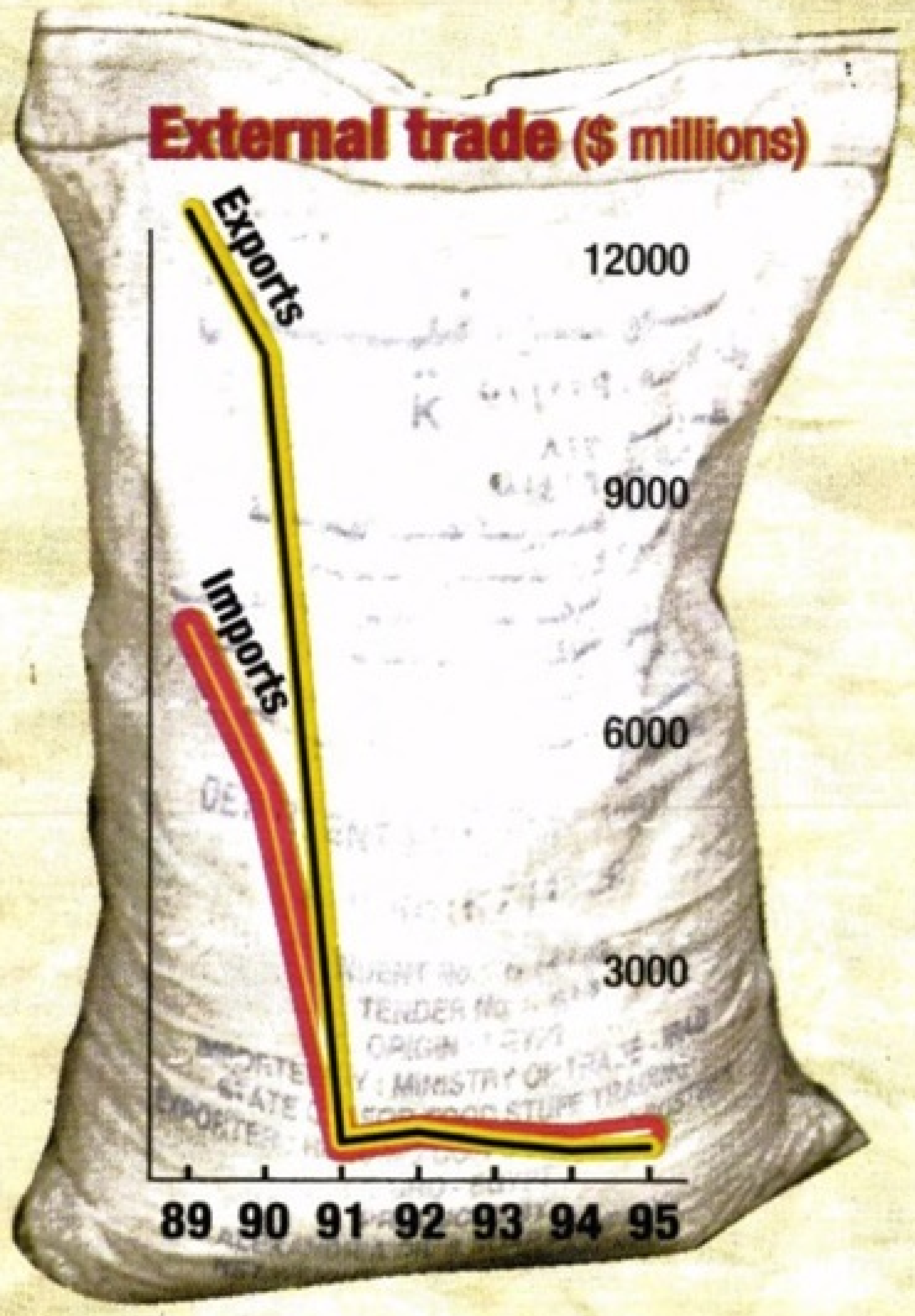
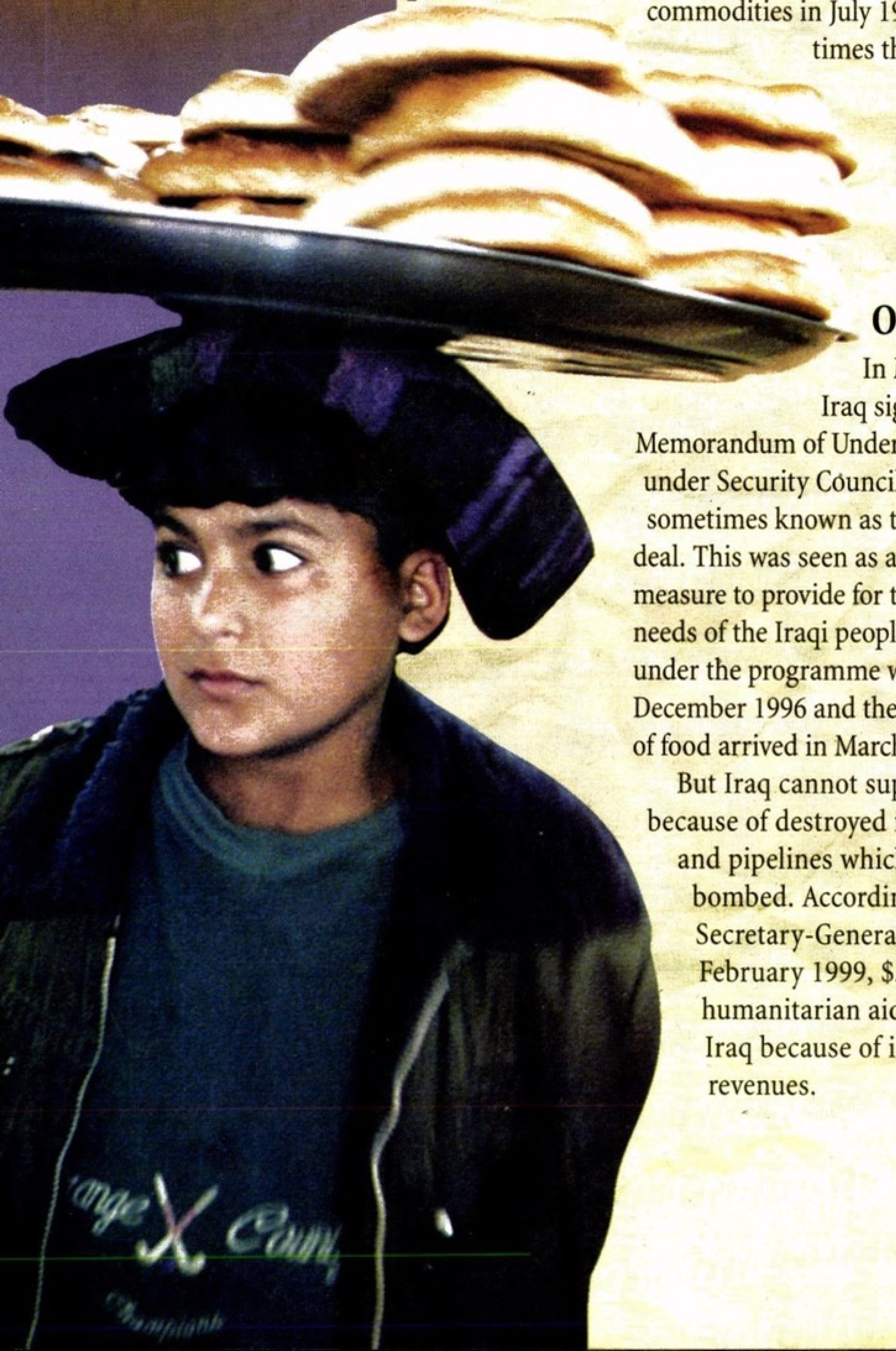
KAREN ROBINSON / FORMAT



Economic collapse [5]

The entire Iraqi economy amounts to just 2% of the annual US defense budget of $265 billion. Iraq's total GDP has fallen to just $5.7 billion, or $247 per capita (down from $60 billion before the Gulf War). In 1989 oil accounted for 61% of Iraq's GDP and agriculture only 5%. Before the Gulf War Iraq imported about two-thirds of its food and was heavily dependent on oil.

The average annual salary has declined from $335 in 1988 (using the free-market exchange rate) to $24 in 1999. Average shop prices for essential commodities in July 1995 stood at 850 times the July 1990 level.[6]



Oil for food

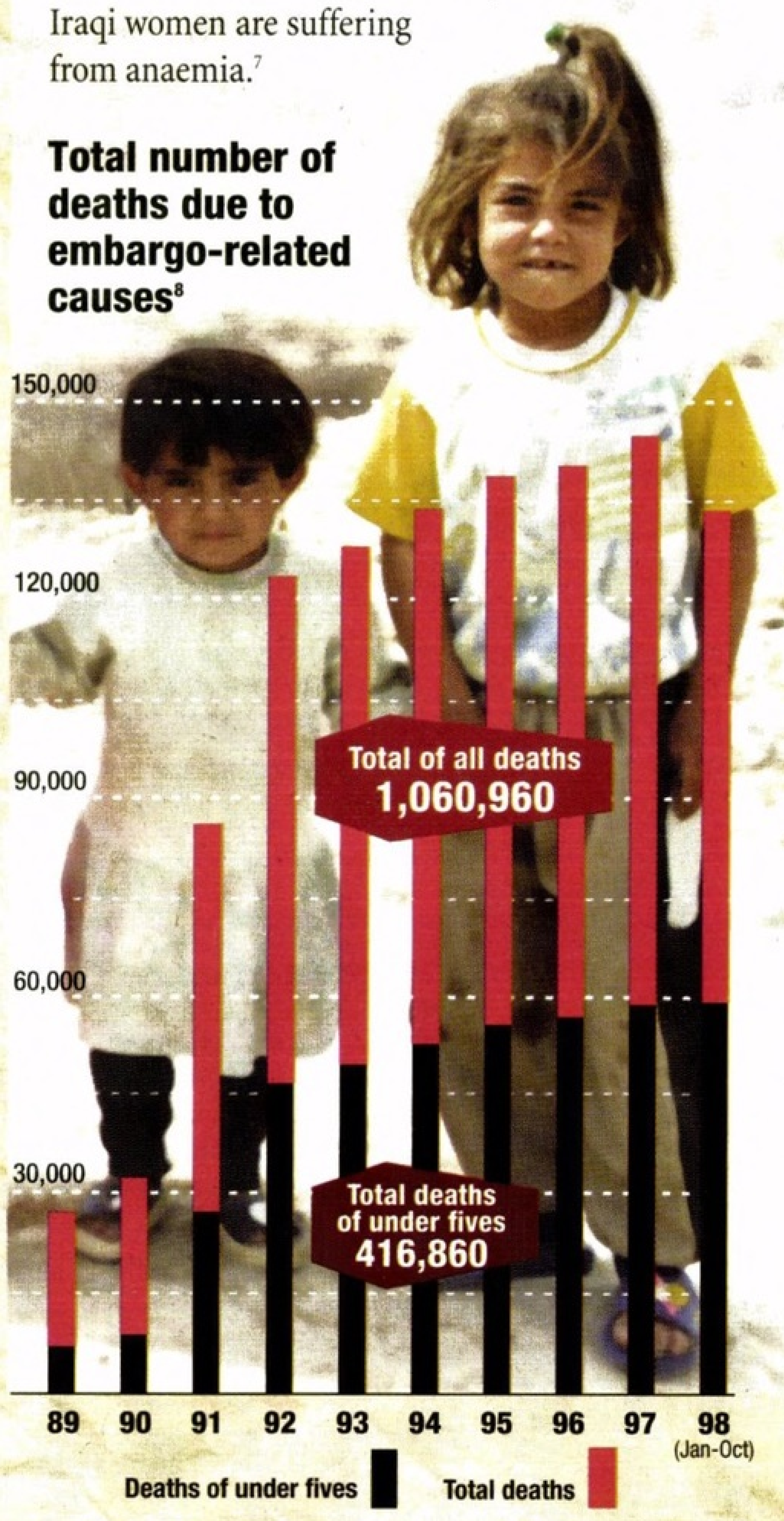
In May 1996 Iraq signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) under Security Council Resolution 986, sometimes known as the oil-for-food deal. This was seen as a temporary measure to provide for the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. The first oil under the programme was exported in December 1996 and the first shipments of food arrived in March 1997.

But Iraq cannot supply enough oil because of destroyed infrastructure and pipelines which continue to be bombed. According to the UN Secretary-General's report of February 1999, $500 million in humanitarian aid never reached Iraq because of insufficient oil revenues.

Vital statistics

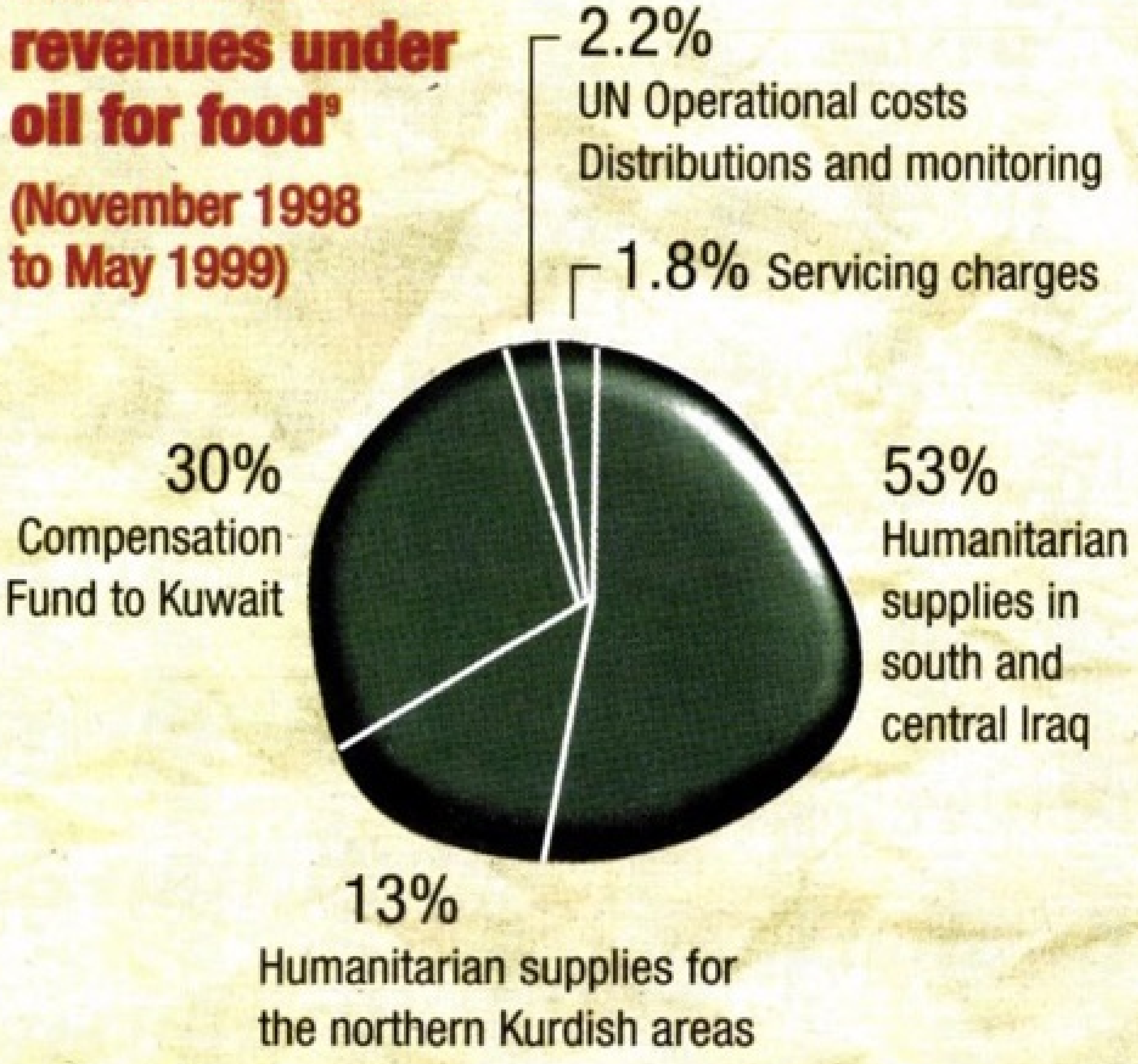
There has been a major increase in the number of deaths, in particular of infants and young children. The infant-mortality rate has risen from 30.5 per 1,000 in 1989 to 97.2 per 1,000 in 1997.[6] The maternal-mortality rate has risen from 50 per 100,000 live births in 1989 to 117 in 1997.[2] Low birth-weight babies (less than 2.5 kg) rose from 4% in 1990 to around a quarter of registered births in 1997, due mainly to maternal malnutrition. As many as 70% of Iraqi women are suffering from anaemia.[7]

Total number of deaths due to embargo-related causes[8]



Percentage allocation of oil revenues under oil for food[9]

(November 1998 to May 1999)



Life in the danger

Nikki van der Gaag reports on why the citizens of Mosul can't get a decent night's sleep.

HER name means 'the East'; the East where the sun rises, but also the mysterious East, the Orient of myth and legend. She is old, her face, once clearly beautiful, now has that look of utter weariness that I have seen so often in Iraq. Exhaustion, however, does not mean defeat, and her words come fast and furious.

'Don't talk to me about the Americans! It is because of the Americans that I am hungry and thirsty and my grandchildren wake in the night afraid of the bombs. The US planes have been bombing here every day since December. May God damn the Americans and God bless President Saddam Hussein!'

She stares at us so indignantly that even she cannot help smiling despite herself as the rest of the family burst out laughing.

Her son Haitam is more subdued as we sit on one of two beds, placed end-to-end in the tiny room. The only other contents are a broken cupboard containing an oil lamp and an old iron.

'Five of us sleep in this room in winter. When it rains the roof leaks and we all get wet', says Haitam. And he points to the stains on the ceiling of the impeccably tidy room. 'In the summer we sleep on the roof, like everyone else. It may be more dangerous because of the bombing, but at least it is cool.

'This room costs me 15,000 dinars a month. I used to work for a Bulgarian company and earn a good wage but there are no foreign companies now so I work as a daily labourer – on the days I work I earn 1,000 dinars a day. My son Omar, aged ten, now has to come and work with me. I would have liked to keep him in school but this was not possible.' Haitam's voice is edged with regret.

In 1985, an average civil servant's monthly salary was the equivalent of $200. Today it is just $2

Omar is not the only child who has had to drop out of school. Schooling used to be free and compulsory – parents could be fined if their children did not attend. Now everyone turns a blind eye. Children walk the streets, shining shoes, selling tissues and sticks of incense. When I ask them how old they are, they give an age at least three or four years more than I imagine, and I realize they are now stunted from a childhood with not enough protein.

NIKKI VAN DER GAAG

Farmer Karim Ghadar looks at his fields, which are suffering the worst drought in living memory; Grandmother East, exhausted but defiant.

zone

Results of a nutritional survey conducted on 15,000 children under five in April 1997 showed that almost the whole child population was affected. One in every four infants is malnourished.[1]

Haitam at least has work so his family may go hungry but will not starve. 'I get about 20 days' work a month if I am lucky. With the Government rations we can manage for the first 20 days of each month.'

The rations that Haitam, and each Iraqi citizen, receives from the Government vary from month to month according to how much oil Iraq has managed to sell under the oil-for-food deal. These now include rice, wheat, sugar, cooking oil, tea, soap, milk powder for babies and very occasionally cheese or milk. An international multidisciplinary team reported in 1996 that 'the [ration] system is highly equitable and appears to be one of the most efficient distribution systems operating in the world' and that 'there appears to be a high level of political commitment on the part of the Government to ensure that people have access to the basic bundle of staple commodities'.

'Without this system,' added the report, 'the Iraqis would likely have experienced a widespread famine'.[2]

But even with the ration system, life is hard. Says Haitam: 'After the 20th of the month we have to live on tea and bread, with a little tomato and oil in the evening. We are helped by friends and relatives, otherwise I don't know how we would all manage. When we have something to spare we share it with them, and when they have extra they give it to us.'

This spirit of generosity also extends to foreigners. We never spoke to anyone without being invited back to their house, or offered small glasses of sweet tea – an Iraqi tradition.

And yet tea, sugar and even kerosene (in a country sitting on the world's second-largest oil reserves) are in short supply.

On top of everything else, water has become a problem. This year has seen the worst drought in living memory. The Tigris is very low, partly due to the drought and possibly also due to the 21 dams constructed further up the Tigris in the Kurdish part of Turkey.[3]

We speak to a group of farmers cutting their wheat at the side of the road some 30 kilometres from Mosul. The grandfather, his two sons, their wives and four of their children are bent double in the hot sun.

'This is the first year in 50 I have known so little rain,' says Karim Ghadar, the father, as he straightens up to welcome us. 'Look at our crop. It is half the height it would normally be.' The wheat is a faded yellow and reaches to our knees. 'If there was rain this would be up here'. And he raises his hand above his head. 'If it rains we live well. We can sell our crops and we have a cow and 100 sheep. The Government is giving us six kilos of food for our sheep each month. But if it doesn't rain soon I don't know what will happen.' He smiles a toothless smile and looks up at the sky, crossing himself. 'We can only hope that God will provide.' Like many of the people in the villages surrounding Mosul, Karim is a Christian.

He hurries down to a little cool hollow where he keeps a basin of home-made sheep's yoghurt and which he offers to us each in turn.

One of the strange effects of the sanctions is that farmers and those with land to grow things are now better off than professionals. In 1985, an average civil servant's monthly salary was the equivalent of $200. Today it is just $2. And yet in July 1995

Biological warfare

A little fly which causes horrendous injury and death to both animals and people. Courtesy of Uncle Sam?

Iraq accuses the US of complicity in a plague of foot and mouth disease and screw worm which is reaching epidemic proportions due to the collapse of the veterinary infrastructure. Iraq's major veterinary plant, one of the main producers of a vaccine for foot and mouth disease in the area, was closed by UNSCOM in 1995 (see page 17) and consignments of veterinary medicines are routinely vetoed by the Sanctions Committee.

The screw worm fly, unknown in Iraq before 1996, has devastated cattle.

Screw worm, indigenous to the US, Mexico and Central America, infects the wounds and orifices of warm-blooded livestock and can affect humans. The screw worm fly can travel up to 290 kilometres in several days and under warm, favourable conditions completes its life cycle in as few as three weeks. The larvae can consume an entire cow in five to seven days. At least 40 people have also died in Iraq.

Screw worm was unknown in Iraq until September 1996 when it suddenly appeared north of Baghdad and spread quickly to 12 of Iraq's 18 governorates. 'We have no idea how it got here, in the heart of the country,' said Professor Basil of Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture. 'But to date there have been over 70,000 reported cases.'

The US has had considerable success in eradicating screw worm by breeding sterile male screw worm flies and releasing them from the air into infected areas. An article in the *Baghdad Observer* in July 1997 noted that 'a fast-breeder factory capable of producing up to five million flies a week has unsterilized parent flies for every sterilized fly... That these Latin American parasites are now to be found in Iraq should provoke a few questions about the probability of biological warfare.'

The article went on: 'To answer the question of how the flies came to Iraq, one does not have to look far; the same way the sterilized insects are delivered, in boxes on a small plane.' The only flights in and out of Iraq are those of the UN or, more recently, the bombings by US and British planes.

There was an alternative treatment being produced at the El Shifa factory in Khartoum, Sudan – and being exported at a fraction of the world market price. But on 20 August 1998 US planes bombed the factory, claiming that it was producing chemical weapons – an allegation subsequently disproved.

Iraq is not the only country of which the US disapproves to have suffered such an infestation. The CIA have admitted a range of biological attacks in Cuba. A biological warfare expert at the German Bundestag noted that 'Iraq is the latest victim of what appears to be a deliberate introduction of screw worm... in Libya an outbreak occurred in 1989 at a time of exceptionally strained relations with the US. In a year it covered 5,000 kilometres and killed 12,000 livestock.'

In early July of this year, Ian Broughton, a New Zealand national, employed by the UN in demining work, was expelled from Iraq for allegedly planting boxes of locust larvae in the north of the country, an allegation the UN categorically denies.

Felicity Arbuthnot

KAREN ROBINSON / FORMAT

Dolls for sale – families are forced to sell their most treasured possessions in order to eat.

average shop prices of essential commodities stood at 850 times their July 1990 level.[4] In the space of less than a decade, a wealthy oil-rich society has been reduced to a pre-industrial state.

The middle classes are forced to look elsewhere for income. Every taxi-driver I met in Baghdad had once been an engineer or a doctor or a teacher. A UN survey of professionals shows that 63 per cent are now working in 'general service or menial labour areas'.

Rich and poor alike have sold all they can to buy food. Every day in certain parts of Baghdad you see people squatting on the pavement selling a few books, a couple of pairs of shoes, or even their children's toys. But few can afford to buy. Those who could do so have long since left the country, either to escape the regime or because the life here is so expensive. It is estimated that two million Iraqi professionals are working outside the country.

And few people come here any more, unless they are working for the UN. There are only six non-governmental organizations and no tourists. Iraq once had a thriving tourist trade, but the only guide book you can now buy is dated 1982. The centre of Baghdad has a cluster of once-smart hotels. In one, there is a shop is full of family heirlooms; silver, paintings, carpets, musical instruments; things which have clearly been loved and handed down from generation to generation. They now sit and gather dust, waiting for buyers who never come. No-one can afford such luxuries any more.

Yet many of the families who possessed such treasures still have substantial amounts of money sitting in foreign banks. All overseas Iraqi assets – including private bank accounts – have been frozen since the Gulf War. It is estimated that there are 30,000 such accounts in Britain alone.

Some people of course do profit from the embargo. And it has often been pointed out that the President and officials of the ruling Ba'ath party are not starving. But even they can't escape polluted air, dirty water and an almost completely destroyed sewage system. It is estimated that between four and eight per cent of the population are smuggling goods across the border, doing deals, and as a result managing very well. If you have foreign currency in Iraq – even quite a small amount – you can buy most things. But you have to have hard cash – ideally dollars – as there are no facilities to change traveller's cheques or deal with credit cards. When I changed my first $50 I felt like a bank robber; the pile of 250-dinar notes could have filled a small suitcase.

'You know,' said one diplomatic source,' people are always going on about Saddam's palaces, 'but quite frankly, anyone with foreign currency is rich. Labour costs peanuts, local materials are cheap. One of those palaces probably cost the same as a two-up two down in Neasden or a bungalow in East York.'[5]

Haitam's small room is very far from a palace, however, and as we continue to talk into the cool of the evening we are suddenly plunged into darkness. The electricity has gone and our visit is over. His wife lights the oil lamp with an ease borne of much practice. We shake hands and cross the yard by the light of the moon.

As we head back to our hotel, I imagine East and her family making up their beds on the flat roof above that little room. As Mosul settles down for the night I know that each and every person is listening for the faraway drone of an aeroplane engine, harbinger of the next delivery of Western bombs. ■

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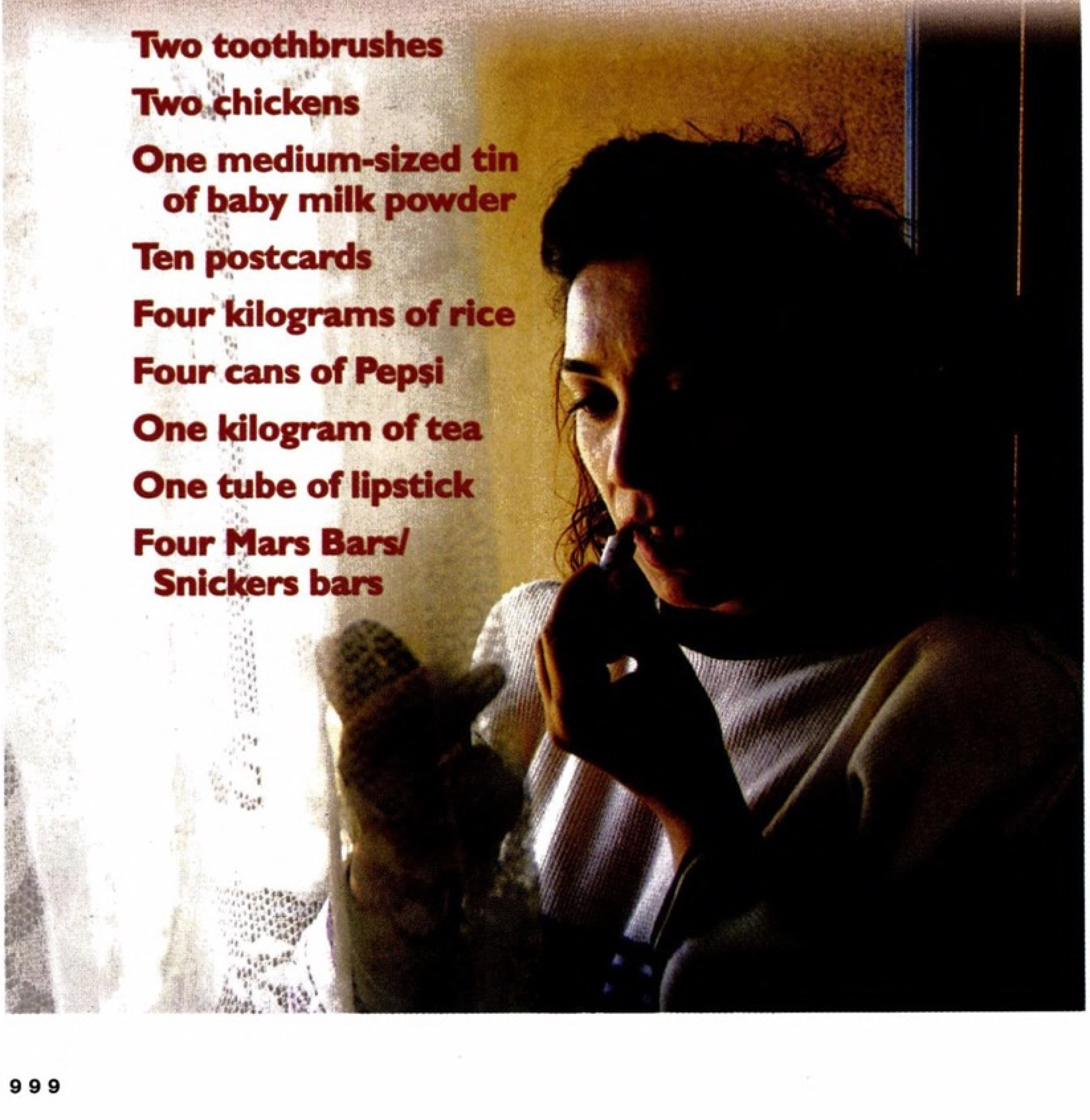
1 UNICEF, April 1998. 2 CESR Mission to Iraq. 3 Friends of the Earth reports that the Ilisu dam, 60 kilometres north of the Iraqi border, will flood 70 Kurdish villages (including the historic Hasan Keyf, one of the oldest human settlements in the world) and displace 20,000 people. The environmental impact is unknown, but the dam will allow Turkey to control the flow of the Tigris. This dam is being assisted through export credits by the British, Italian, Swiss, Swedish, Japanese and German governments. For more information email: info@foe.co.uk or phone +44 171 490 1555. 4 Certain items have risen even more than this; for example, a box of 30 eggs has gone up by 1,111 per cent, wheat flour has risen by 11,667 per cent, cooking oil by 4,500 per cent (FAO report, Rome, 1995). 5 Interview with Nikki van der Gaag and Felicity Arbuthnot, May 1999.

The cost of survival

Each of the following costs the equivalent of an average professional's monthly salary:



Two toothbrushes

Two chickens

One medium-sized tin of baby milk powder

Ten postcards

Four kilograms of rice

Four cans of Pepsi

One kilogram of tea

One tube of lipstick

Four Mars Bars/ Snickers bars

CAROLINE PENN / PANOS PICTURES

Sinbad the artist

NIKKI VAN DER GAAG

Sensual, strong, and determined, **Mohamed Ghani** is one of Iraq's most famous living sculptors.

YOU can recognise Mohamed Ghani's studio immediately among all the other houses in this quiet residential street. It has a bluebell-blue steel door, for one thing. And the handles are carved in burnished metal.

He opens the door in a wave of energy that sweeps us into a light high-ceilinged studio. The first thing to greet our eyes is a huge plaster model of Jesus Christ on a wooden scaffold. The body hangs painfully from its nails. Then we begin to take in the rest; works large and small in plaster, wood, clay and bronze, copper. 'Welcome, welcome,' he beams as his eyes bore intensely into ours, refusing to release us.

Mohamed Ghani never stops talking. His English is heavily accented, but its musical lilt is not of the Arab world. As he talks, he uses his hands to illustrate or to drive home a crucial point. He bursts into fits of merry laughter, his teeth shining in his bronzed face while his white curly hair springs wildly from his head.

Next he whisks us over to one side of the room to appreciate his latest idea – a small model of a fountain based on Aladdin's lamp. Then to Sinbad the sailor, balanced on two boats, swaying as the river moves. We crack a joke about the similarity between Sinbad and Mohamed Ghani, both perpetually on the move, and he laughs, throwing back his head and then becoming serious. 'Yes, I am Sinbad, but not just because I spent seven years in Italy. We are all Sinbad, all on our own journeys, searching, searching...'

Italy explains the accent, the gestures (he speaks fluent Italian), but the exuberance and the twinkle in his eye are all his own.

'I like working with these Iraqi legends because they all fire the imagination.' And he shows us a tiny bronze flying carpet with the two lovers, Aladdin and Jasmine, setting out on their own journey. 'There is a huge version of this at the new Saddam International airport'. He grins wryly. 'So of course no-one sees it now. The airport is closed under sanctions, so my carpet can fly, but the planes can't.'

'You see' – and now he leans forward to make sure we understand – 'the Iraqi people love sculpture, and sculptors. People come to me and give flowers and gifts. Normally, in Islam you are not allowed to make representations of people, but here in Iraq you see sculpture everywhere. 'And he whispers conspiratorially, leaning towards us: 'We are not supposed to drink alcohol either, but you know, everyone likes a little beer!'

We ask him about the huge Jesus, and the series of 14 large stone murals that represent the stations of the Cross. He hurries us over to that side of the room.

'This is interesting. I am not a Christian, I am not even religious, but I was asked by the Vatican to do this for the Assumption church in Baghdad. You know, the strange thing was that the day I started this work was the day the bombing began in 1991. It was the start of the Gulf War. The studio shook, the windows cracked – you see, some are still cracked – and I cried. I cried for my city which was being bombed and I cried for Jesus who was going to his death. But I didn't stop carving. It took me two years and now these hang in the church. I don't give up easily.'

Next to the panels I notice five grey square blocks with the days of the week carved on them in English. Underneath each is a small squatting figure, bent and dwarfed by the weight of the block. 'These blocks? They are what I feel about the embargo. You see, I went to the Saddam Hospital and I saw all these women bringing in their sick and hungry children and I felt very sad. I felt their heaviness, their sorrow, so I went home and carved these pieces; one for each day of the week.'

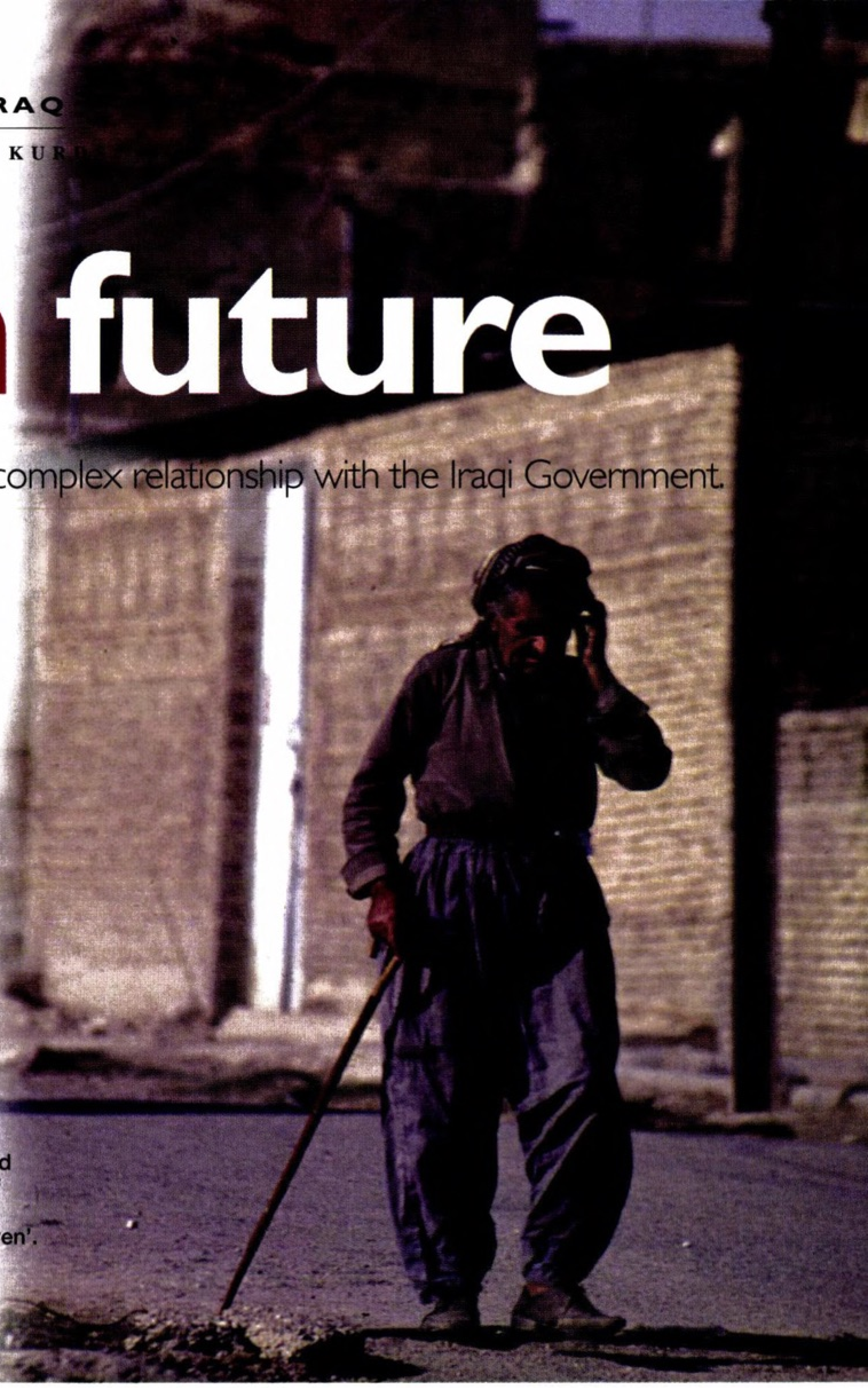
I ask why he wrote the days in English rather than Arabic. His answer comes swiftly: 'Because I want to show people outside Iraq who can read English what is happening here. I am asked to lecture all over the world because my sculptures are on display in many different countries – from Paris to Washington, Moscow to Toronto. I tell people that we are not just a country of tents and camels. We have a civilization that goes back thousands of years. Culture is in our veins, in our blood'. And he strokes his forearms, veins standing out. Then he looks up and wags his finger. 'I am an artist. I am not political. I am simply making what I feel here, inside' and he thumps his fist on his heart. Then he leans forward. 'I make what I want to make, not what I am told to make.'

'The embargo has made life very difficult. In the Academy of Fine Arts there are no paints, no brushes, no canvases. It is hard for young artists. Even I used to carve wood, usually teak from India. Now I can't get this any more, so I use wood that I can salvage from old houses, anything at all.'

His sigh is deep as he examines us from under those bushy brows. 'Sometimes I think the US wants to kill everything in Iraq. But you can tell them that they will not succeed. They will not kill Iraqi people, and they will not kill Mohamed Ghani.' Then his stern glare dissolves into peals of laughter.

> ***'I cried for my city which was being bombed and I cried for Jesus who was going to his death. But I didn't stop carving. I don't give up easily'***

A few days later, when we visit an exhibition of his work in the Saddam Art Gallery, we see the full extent of his talent; the curves and circles, the strong lines and haunting expressions of both figures and his more abstract work. But this museum, like all the others in Iraq, is normally closed. It was bombed in 1993 when the famous artist Laila Al Attar was killed. Some precious works of art were damaged. Now the rest lie unseen, collecting layers of dust in the summer sunshine. ■



Uncertain future

Sarah Graham-Brown outlines the Kurds' complex relationship with the Iraqi Government.

Weary way: an old man in the city of Arbil, inside the Kurdish 'safe haven'.

SEDAT AREL / ISF

THE Kurdish people have retained a distinct identity for at least 2,000 years, living mainly in the mountainous areas of eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, north-western Iran and the south-west of the former Soviet Union.

Although governments' attitudes to their Kurdish minorities have differed, all have been suspicious of Kurdish national aspirations. Turkey has refused, for most of the last 70 years, to accept the Kurds as a separate people, to allow them to use their language or to openly learn about their culture. In the 1990s, measures allowing limited recognition of Kurdish language and culture were set against intensified conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in south-eastern Turkey, bringing in its wake severe human-rights abuses.

Successive Iranian regimes' persecution of the Kurds has been somewhat less harsh, but has nonetheless denied them any real political autonomy. In Iraq, the Ba'athist Government has allowed Kurds more freedom to use their language and express their culture. However, the Kurds' overall experience in Iraq has been one of war, bloodshed and dispossession.

Following decades of intermittent hostilities between the Kurds and a succession of Iraqi governments, the Ba'ath Party in 1970 proposed limited Kurdish autonomy in the north of the country. However, mutual suspicion and Baghdad's reluctance to cede the key economic asset demanded by the Kurds – the oil-rich city of Kirkuk – stymied any agreement. A much watered-down autonomy proposal was rejected by the Kurds in 1974, followed by a fierce war in which the Kurds were supported by Iran. When Iran, pursuing its own political interests, withdrew its support in 1975, Kurdish resistance collapsed.

During the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, Kurdish reluctance to fight for the Baghdad regime led to further conflict. Some Iraqi Kurds received support from the new Islamic Republic of Iran. From the mid-1980s, the Iraqi Government began an operation to clear the predominantly Kurdish rural population from its northern borderlands adjacent to Iran and Turkey. This resulted in many thousands of deaths and mass displacements, culminating in the so-called *Anfal* campaigns of 1988. Some 4,000 Kurdish towns, villages and settlements were razed to the ground. Many of their inhabitants were relocated to so-called collective towns constructed by the Government, mainly in the lowland Kurdish areas. Up to 100,000 people remain unaccounted for from 1988 alone.

Iraqi forces also launched a number of chemical attacks in Kurdish areas in 1987/88. Amnesty International estimated that some 5,000 people died as a result of the chemical gas attack on the town of Halabja in March 1988. During 1988, some 55,000 Kurds fled to Turkey and a similar number to Iran. Although Kurds were the primary targets of these abuses, other groups living in the predominantly Kurdish north, including Assyrian Christians, Turcomans and Arabs, were also victims.

After the 1991 Gulf War, the short-lived Kurdish uprising in March was followed by brutal Iraqi reprisals. Some two million Kurds and others from the northern governorates fled to the borders with Turkey and to Iran, creating one of the largest and most rapid refugee flows in recent times. In April 1991, the Gulf War allies, responding to this massive crisis and to Turkey's refusal to accept the refugees, imposed a 'safe haven' or 'no-fly zone' covering the north-eastern part of the Kurdish region (most of Dohuk governorate) to allow the refugees to return (although some 150,000-200,000 have still not done so). Coalition troops were withdrawn in July, but a no-fly zone covering the region north of the 36th Parallel was maintained. This led to the return of many of the refugees, though Iraqi forces remained in the Kurdish areas outside the safe haven.

In October 1991, following the failure of autonomy talks with Baghdad during the summer, the Iraqi Government withdrew all troops, funds and services from the Kurdish region (covering the three northern governorates of Dohuk, Arbil and Sulaymaniya but excluding the Kirkuk area) and imposed an increasingly tight embargo on goods crossing what became a de facto border with the rest of Iraq.

Despite the new opportunities created by the withdrawal of Iraqi government control, the Iraqi Kurds found themselves in a difficult economic and political environment. A Kurdish regional parliament was elected in May 1992 but lacked funds and a recognized international status. By May 1994, internal rivalries had provoked a low-level civil war in the region, with sporadic hostilities continuing until the end of 1997.

Iraqi Kurdish politics has been dominated by two major parties, The first major Kurdish resistance movement, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was established in the 1940s and led first by Mullah Mustafa Barzani, and then by his son Masud Barzani. In 1975, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani split from the KDP. The Kurdistan Front, formed in 1987, bringing together the KDP and PUK with a number of smaller parties, was maintained until the 1992 elections.

The international community has no clear political response to the Kurds' future

After the elections, the KDP and PUK as the dominant parties embarked on an unsatisfactory power-sharing arrangement which limited the role of smaller parties. Both the KDP and PUK wanted to claim leadership of the region, and their rivalry was exacerbated by the deep distrust between Masud Barzani and Jalal Talabani.

The withdrawal of central government funds left the local administration dependent largely on customs revenues to pay staff and run services. The geographical position of the KDP, which is dominant in the north-west of the Kurdish region, gave it control of the lucrative Turkish border trade. The more modest trade with Iran was mainly in the hands of the PUK. When internal fighting broke out 1994, control over these funds reverted to the parties and were a key element in sustaining the conflict, allowing each to buy arms and pay their fighters (*peshmergas*).

The increased PKK (the main Kurdish party in Turkey) presence in northern Iraq since the 1991 Gulf War, and Turkish military efforts to eradicate it, became a significant factor in the rift between the two Iraqi Kurdish parties. Mainly for reasons of geography, the PUK's relations with the PKK were closer than those of the KDP. Both the former two shared a long-standing relationship with the Syrian Government.

By 1995, the internal conflict had effectively split Iraqi Kurdistan into two separate, party-dominated administrations. A succession of initiatives were undermined by the unwillingness of the two party leaders to make any real concessions and by interference from rival alliances. All the regional powers (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) attempted to influence events in Iraqi Kurdistan, or at the very least, to prevent rival powers from dominating the region.

By early 1998, both parties appeared more inclined to compromise and put forward peace proposals. Since that time, the US and Britain have, somewhat reluctantly, attempted more active intervention. In September 1998, the US brokered an agreement signed in Washington which was intended to lead to revenue sharing, a reunited administration and regional elections. However, talks between the two parties in June 1999 revealed continuing disagreements on the process of reunification and relations with the PKK. Furthermore, the political problems which led to the de facto separation of Iraqi Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq remain unresolved. An atmosphere of uncertainty for the future prevails.

In April 1991, UN Security Council Resolution 688, calling on Iraq to cease repression of its population, referred specifically to the plight of the Iraqi Kurds. But since that time, the international community has not developed a clear or consistent political response to their future. The status of the Kurdish-controlled region remained ambiguous because most Western governments feared any hint of separatism on the part of the Kurds. This would anger Turkey, an important NATO member and ally of the US. This despite the fact that the Iraqi Kurds never demanded independence – in 1992, the newly elected parliament called for a federal structure in Iraq. Nonetheless, no formal recognition was given to the Kurdish regional administration, while the idea of a UN protectorate never gained international support.

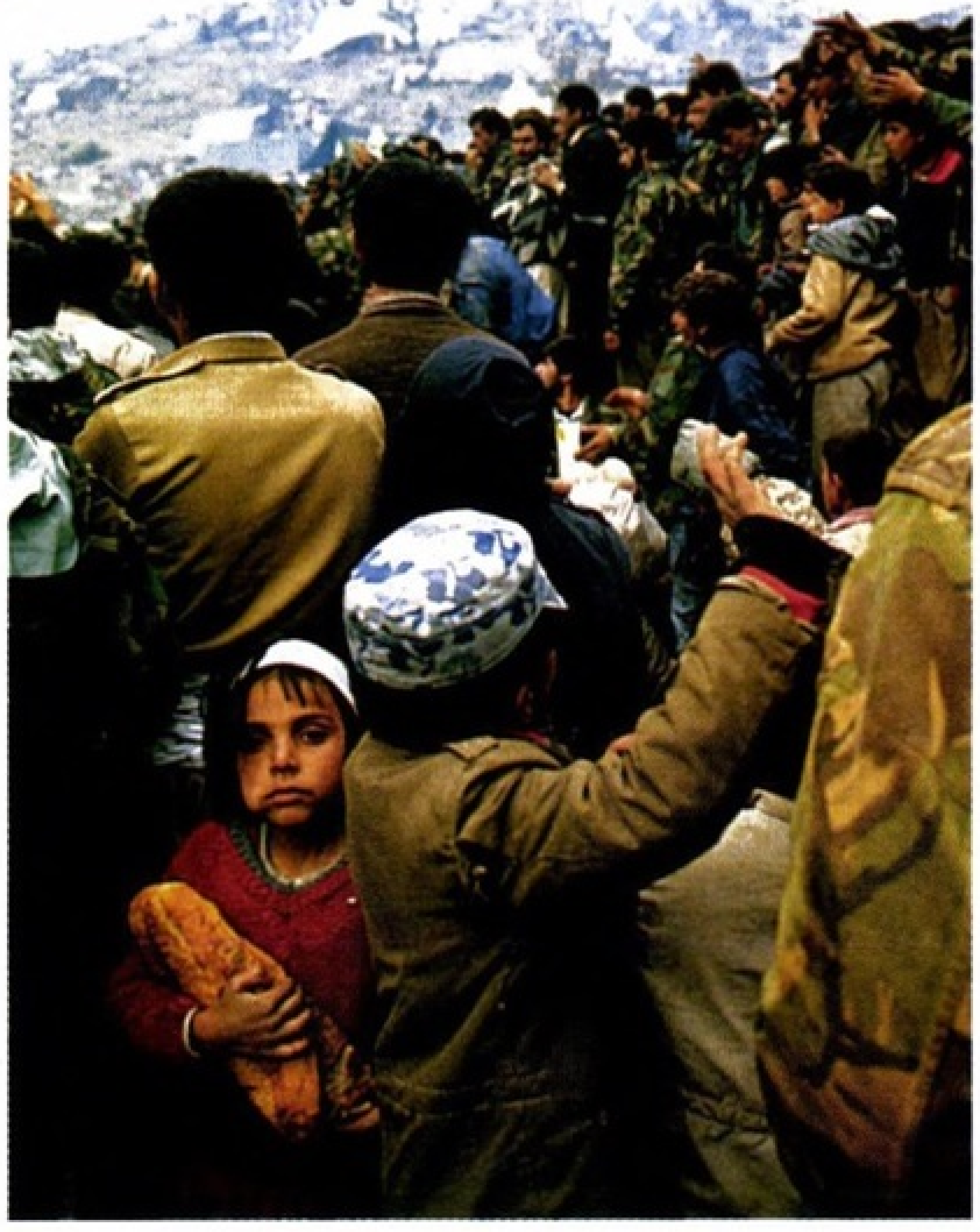
The no-fly zone has been maintained, though in 1996 France withdrew its forces, leaving only US and British planes operating from Incirlik air base in Turkey. The no-fly zone has deterred Iraqi forces from retaking Iraqi Kurdistan, but Turkey has been able to exercise increasing influence – including military incursion – in the region. The safety of the population in Iraqi Kurdistan is increasingly compromised by the actions of its own political leadership, the interests of regional powers and by US efforts to use this region to 'put pressure' on Saddam Hussein. In 1996, Iraqi forces staged a brief incursion to the city of Arbil, within the no-fly zone, to attack CIA-supported Iraqi opposition forces based there.

The Iraqi Government has also pursued a policy of forcing Kurds from the Kirkuk area to move to the Kurdish-controlled region.

Iraqi Kurdistan has remained subject to UN sanctions against Iraq despite repeated requests from the Kurdish Parliament for exemptions. The embargo has limited the possibility of improving or even refurbishing the infrastructure, exploiting small-scale oil reserves or rebuilding the few existing local industries. At the same time, from late 1991 until 1997, the Iraqi Government maintained its own economic embargo on Iraqi Kurdistan. To balance this, the Kurds have received a much higher level of international humanitarian aid per capita than the rest of Iraq. This was designed to compensate for the so-called 'double embargo'.

As a result, significant progress was made in restoring the rural economy of Iraqi Kurdistan and resettling people in their villages. However, economic revival was limited to agriculture and a thriving smuggling trade. Although nutritional and health conditions did not decline as radically as in government-controlled Iraq, there were periods of serious hardship.

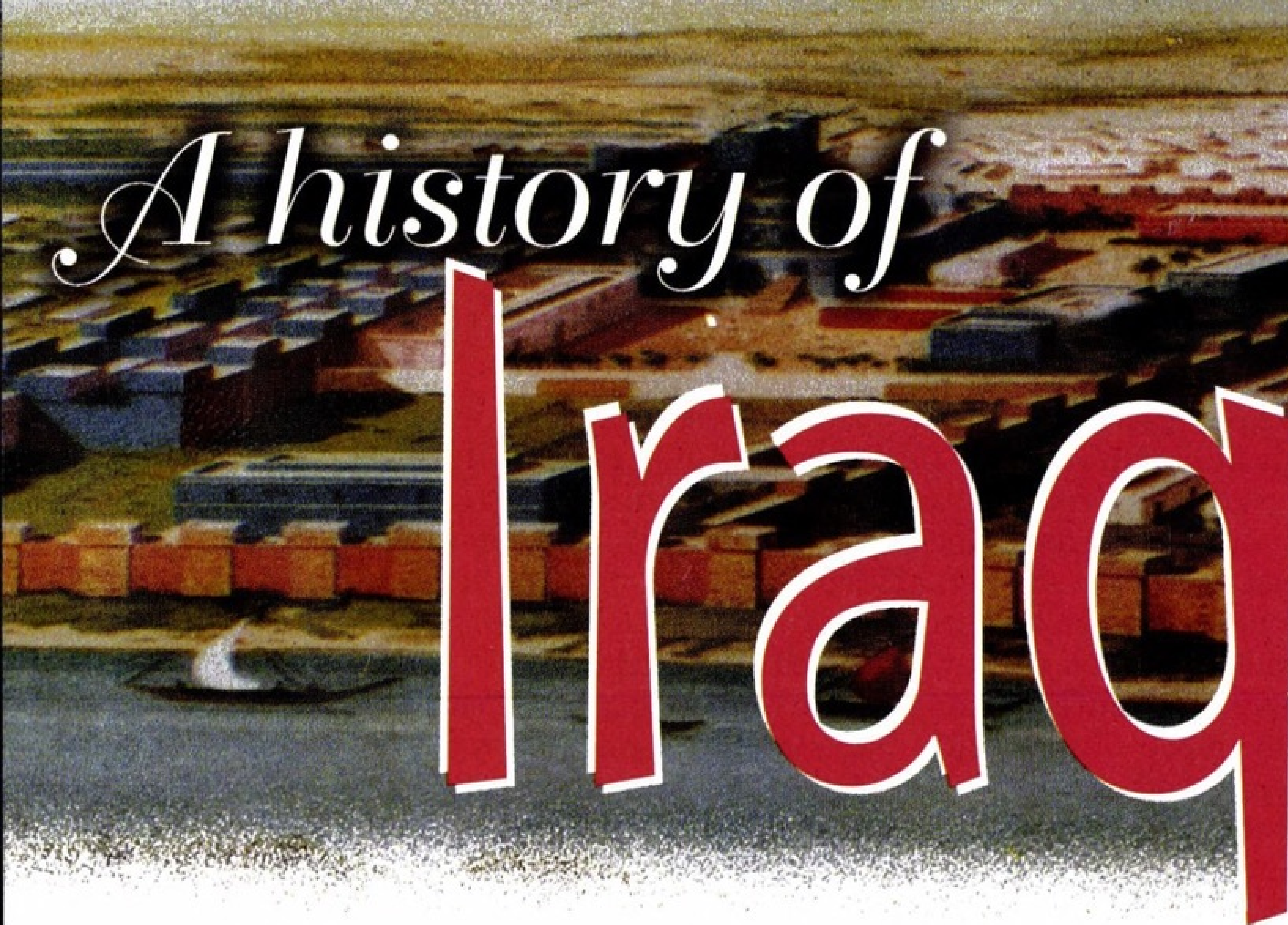
Bread, not bombs please: food distribution for Kurdish refugees.



JASPER YOUNG / PANOS PICTURES

Implementation of the oil-for-food resolutions in 1997 has significantly eased conditions. Some 13 per cent of each tranche of oil funds go to the Kurds, although food supplies are purchased centrally and distributed by the Iraqi Government. Iraq has effectively lifted the internal embargo, while the increased flow of goods has diminished the intensity of inter-party competition over customs revenues. A rationing system covering the whole population has increased food availability, brought down prices, and improved nutrition, though aid agencies are concerned that food aid may undermine the fragile rural economy. Although this has eased the immediate economic crisis, it has done little so far to create an economic base to provide employment and encourage investment in the longer term. Political uncertainty continues to haunt the future of Iraqi Kurdistan. ■

Sarah Graham-Brown is a writer and researcher on the Middle East; from 1991-95 she was co-ordinator of the Gulf Information Project. She has worked as a consultant to Christian Aid on Iraq. She is the author of *Sanctioning Saddam: the politics of intervention in Iraq*.



A history of Iraq

Land between two rivers

The ancient land known in Greek as 'Mesopotamia' or the 'land between two rivers' is the site of what is today the beleaguered state of Iraq. This fertile plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was one of the cradles of human civilization. It is here that some of the first large-scale irrigation systems gave birth to a settled form of agriculture and to a centralized state. This provided security from hunger and the basis for the growth of towns such as Babylon, built by the Akkadians around 2,225 BC. Those who settled between the rivers – the Sumerians, Akkadians and later the Assyrians – had to be constantly vigilant against the peoples of the surrounding desert who cast envious eyes on their fertile bounty. Military virtues (including the ability to capture slaves) were thus mixed with other accomplishments of 'civilization' such as the written word (including the famous *Epic of Gilgamesh*), a legal code, the wheel, and the plough. The legendary wealth of this fertile crescent is echoed in biblical literature; the Euphrates flows through the Garden of Eden and the Assyrian King Nebuchadnezzar (villainized in the Book of Daniel) is held to be responsible for building the Tower of Babel in downtown Babylon (illustration above). As always it is difficult to sort out political bias from historical fact.

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

C Haol Closs

The unholy wars

Facts, however, are more easily established when written down. The first appearance of the word 'Arab' is an Assyrian inscription. Early Arabs, keen traders and skilled in architecture, sculpture and metalwork, followed a supreme being whom they called *Al-Rahman*, 'the Merciful'. But life was anything but merciful, as the stories of Sheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights* show.

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam took a firm hold on the region. Succession struggles between local Caliphs (kings) came to an end in 1055 when Tughril Beg, a warrior from the Turkish steppes, established a Seljuk dynasty (Sunni and Sufi Muslims) banned Arabic and marginalized Shi'a and Arab influence.

Then the first of a series of Christian holy wars (The Crusades) against Islam began, the ulterior motive for which was to establish European control over Middle Eastern riches. But the Crusaders faced powerful opposition, particularly from the legendary Salah-el-Din (Saladin). Successive Crusades failed to make significant gains, though the missions were carried out with such barbarity that Arabs still quote stories of the Crusaders eating Muslim babies. The peace of Ramla in 1192 consolidated Muslim victories but left the Islamic world fatally weakened in the face of the next onslaught – the Mongols.

Magnificent murderers

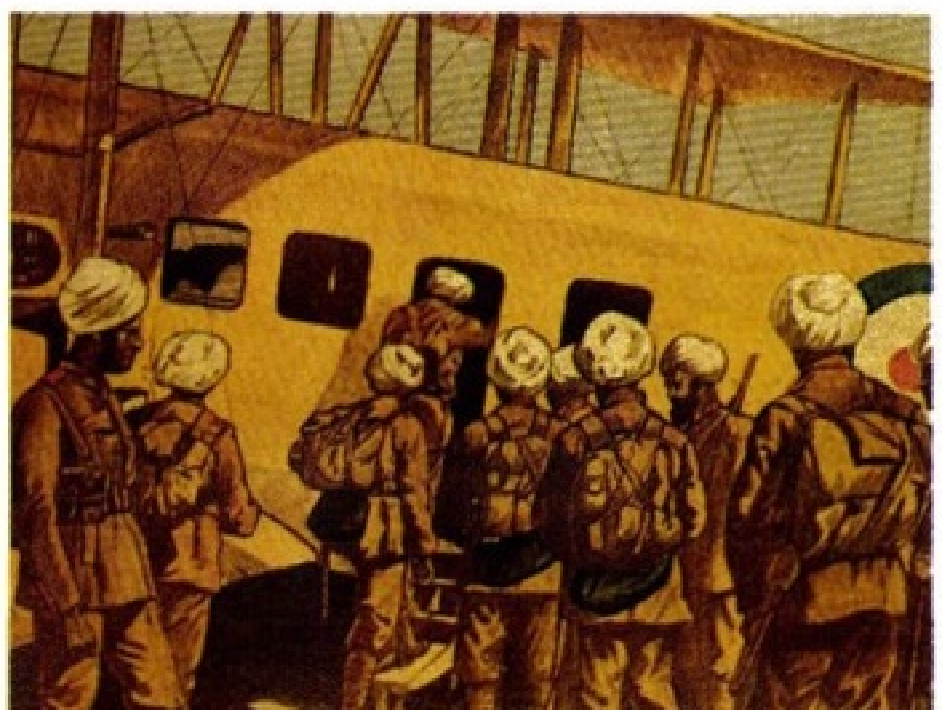
The Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan declared that 'All cities must be razed, so that the world may once again become a great steppe in which Mongol mothers may suckle free and happy children'. In 1258 he reduced Baghdad (now the capital) to rubble, killing 800,000 men, women and children in the process. But like all empires, the rule of the Mongols eventually declined, and they were defeated by the Ottomans under Suleiman the Magnificent. At the height of his power Suleiman presided over territory that spread from the deserts of North Africa to the plains of Hungary – a vast swathe to equal any empire. The next three centuries saw Ottoman rule interrupted only by sporadic Persian forays into Iraq. The hard-pressed people of the capital bore the brunt of this fighting and faced starvation and an attack of the bubonic plague in 1831.

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

Black gold and the Union Jack

The discovery of oil at the end of the nineteenth century meant that covetous Western gazes were once more being cast in Iraq's direction. Britain already supplied 65 per cent of the Mesopotamian market and controlled much of the carrying trade in the area. In March 1917, in the midst of World War One, the British army took Baghdad with the help of an Arab revolt against the German-allied Ottomans. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 Arab lands were effectively shared out among the Western powers – despite earlier promises of independence after the war. Under the Sykes-Picot Agreement the entire Middle East was carved up between France and Britain. France kept Syria, Greater Lebanon and some of northern Iraq while Britain grabbed Baghdad and Basra. The long-suffering Kurds were to be kept as a separate entity under the British.

The British brooked no dissent in their rule of Iraq. Winston Churchill argued 'in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilized tribes'– mainly referring to the Kurds. The British crowned Feisal I as puppet-king in 1921. In a counter-insurgency war against a nascent independence movement whole villages were pulverized by artillery, suspected ringleaders shot without trial, and a plethora of nasty weapons such as phosphorus bombs and metal crowsfeet to maim livestock were introduced.



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

British rule: troops on their way to crush a Kurdish insurrection in 1923.

Independence and the Second World War

Although Britain continued to influence affairs through diplomacy and its secret service, in 1932 Iraq became independent and joined the League of Nations (King Feisal, right.visiting Berlin). Iraq was one of the first signatories to the UN Charter on Human Rights.

In 1933 King Feisal I died and was succeeded by his son Ghazi I, whose nationalist sympathies made him the target of several attempted coups. In 1938 General Nuri al-Said seized power, aided by an army faction known as the Seven. The staunchly pro-British Nuri crushed all political dissent. In April 1939 Ghazi was killed in an automobile accident (some believe assassinated by the British), and was succeeded by his infant son Feisal II under a regent.

In March 1940 the anti-British agitator Rashid al-Gilani became Prime Minister and saw a German victory in World War Two as the way of ridding his country of British domination. On 28 April 1941 he signed a secret agreement with German and Italian forces in Baghdad.

But German support never materialized and British troops soon reached Baghdad. Churchill cabled congratulations and noted that the 'immediate task is to get a friendly Government set up in Baghdad'.

This remains the aim of Western policy to this day.

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

Monarchy to Republic

In June 1943 a small group calling themselves the Arab Ba'ath (Resurrection) Party issued their first statement in Damascus. Their principal inspiration was the idea of 'pan-Arabism'; that individual Arab states were 'regions' of an Arab nation.

In 1948, also the year when Israel was established, a new agreement was signed between Britain and Iraq in Portsmouth, England, but it was almost immediately repudiated by Iraq after riots in Baghdad over Palestinian rights.

Meanwhile the oil industry was flourishing. Riches from the oil fields were invested in ambitious national projects. Iraq – like many Third World nations in the Cold War era – was forced to choose between Western powers determined to keep a defence foothold in the area and a Soviet Union trying to develop economic ties with the Middle East. Martial law was imposed twice: once in November 1952, and then again after the Suez crisis in 1956, when Iraq broke diplomatic ties with Britain and France. Meanwhile, the US had made it clear that it would give substantial aid to any Middle Eastern state which would toe the US line.

In 1958 King Feisal, his son, and General Nuri Al Said died in a coup led by the Iraqi army. Brigadier Abd al-Karim Kassem was named Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief. In 1963 Kassem himself fell victim to a military coup when he was shot and replaced by General Aref, who in 1964 announced the merger of all political parties into the Arab Socialist Union and a major nationalization programme. In 1966 decades of Kurdish demands were finally addressed with a decentralized administration and the legal recognition of the Kurdish language and national identity.

The militarization of Iraq

In 1968 a bloodless coup saw President Aref exiled and replaced by General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr. Open hostilities with the Kurds broke out in 1974, but the US, who provided them with weapons, failed to come to their aid when Iraq unleashed a massive attack.

In July 1979 Saddam Hussein Takriti became President. The continuing dispute in the south with Iran over the Shatt Al-Arab waterway led to the Iran-Iraq War which has been compared in terms of slaughter to the First World War. More than a million people had died by the time the war ended in July 1988. Both the US and the USSR assisted and armed Iraq.

Meanwhile, continuous fighting in the north led to a poison gas attack by Iraq on the Kurdish town of Halabja, in which 5,000 people perished. In March1990 Iranian-Kurdish journalist Farzad Bazoft was convicted of espionage and executed in Baghdad. The incident provoked outrage in the West. In July the US Congress voted to impose sanctions against Iraq.

Disputes with Kuwait about oil and land issues became increasingly tense, leading to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces and then the Gulf War. An alliance of 33 nations launched a six-week long attack in which about 250,000 people died and much of Iraq's infrastructure was destroyed. Following Iraq's defeat there were uprisings among the Shi'a population in the south and the Kurds in the north, in the vain hope of Western military support. The Kurds were able to gain a UN-sanctioned 'safe haven' from Iraqi forces presided over by a US-enforced no-fly zone. The Shi'a revolt was brutally suppressed.

In the meantime, sanctions continue. To date more than a million deaths can be traced to their effects.

CAROLINE PENN / PANOS PICTURES

Mourning a martyr: the family of a man who died in the Iran-Iraq War. His son wears his father's bravery medal.

Research by Felicity Arbuthnot and Nikki van der Gaag.

Sources: *Iraq from Sumer to Saddam* Geoff Simons (Macmillan, 1996); *The Fire this time* Ramsey Clark (Thunders Mouth Press, 1994); *The Middle East and North Africa* (Europa Publications); *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* John R Macarthur (University of California Press, 1993).

Tales from the road

Everyone on the hair-raising coach ride through the empty desert to Jordan has their own story to tell. **Nikki van der Gaag** reports.

TEARS drip down the woman's face as the blue coach draws out of the central bus station in Baghdad. She waves to the small group seeing her off until even by craning her neck she can see them no longer. She is a large woman, mid-length brown hair pulled back into a pony tail, wearing a smart skirt and a patterned blouse with gold buttons.

Half an hour later, she is still crying as the bus crosses a blue canal – the Saddam River – and passes flat-roofed houses, palm trees, and sheep. Then we are in the desert; one of the drivers trying desperately to get a shaky TV set to show a video, everyone settling down for a long journey. The bus is full to bursting – two black-robed Shi'a women, possibly a mother, a grandmother and a small boy of about two with a bright plastic lorry, across the aisle; a sheikh in white with a goatee beard and glasses and another man in a red *kuffyiah* behind them; a tiny woman in a blue skirt with short hair and a neat scarf hiding the cross around her neck. A large man snores loudly, mouth wide open.

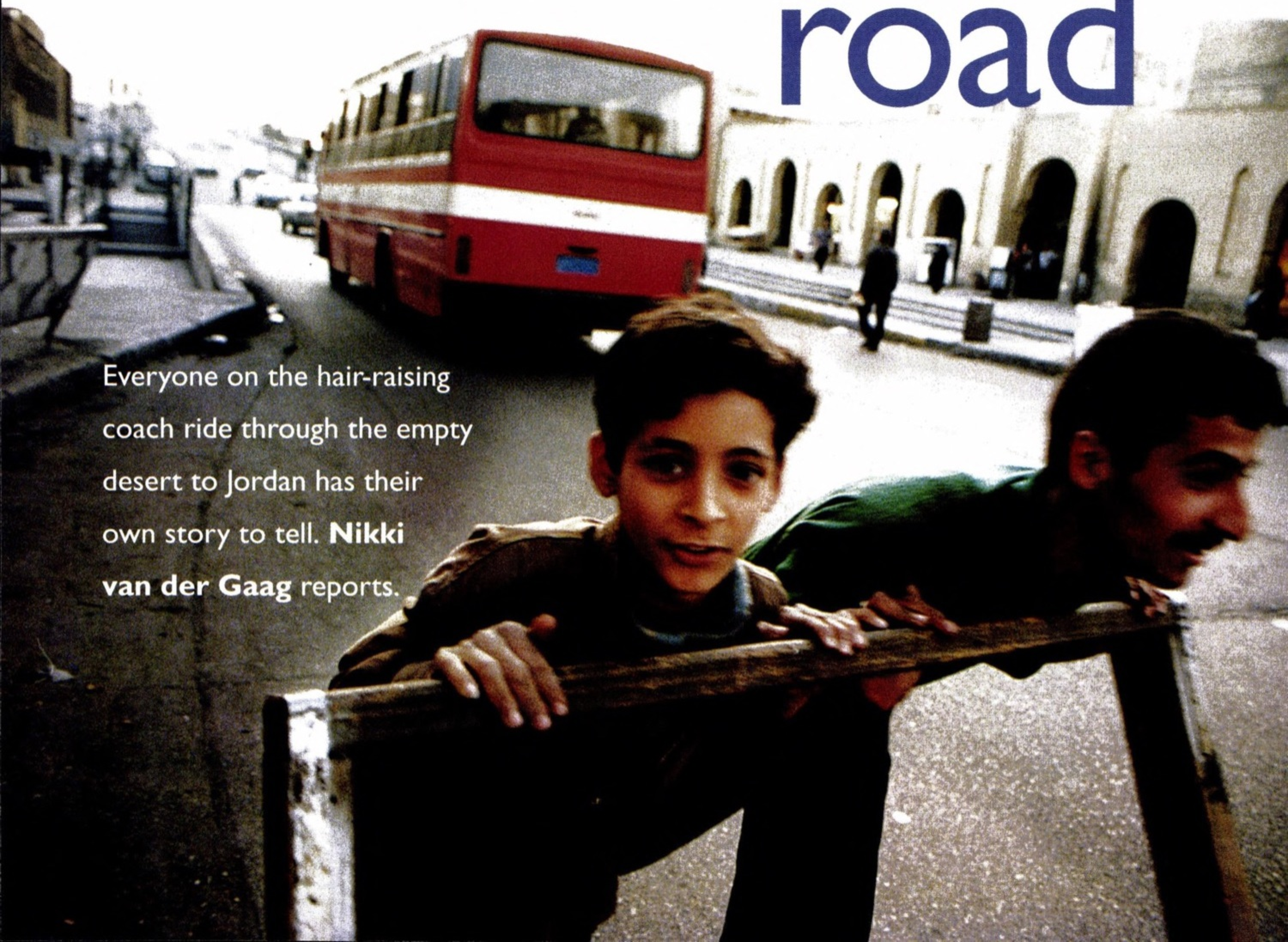
We stop for a short break at an Iraqi service station – where you can fill up a bus for 60 cents because Iraq's unsaleable petrol costs less than water. There is a tanker letting off plumes of black smoke, a store selling big bags of dates and blue-and-white water-coolers, a cage with two tiny quail, a restaurant and a few other stalls selling sweets, water, sunflower seeds, apricots and enormous pale green watermelons.

In the quiet of the ladies' toilet, I say hello to the two Shi'a women and the little boy. The older woman hesitates, her eyes full of pain, and tells me baldly and haltingly: 'This is not his mother. She is dead. She was my daughter, only 20 years old. This is his aunt, my other daughter.' The younger woman kisses the little boy's hair and cuddles him to her.

The daughter was burnt to death. Cooking the children's supper on the calor gas that most people have to use because of frequent power-cuts, she caught fire. I wonder if the little boy was a witness to this painful death; one more casualty of the sanctions regime.

I wash my hands silently as the three sweep out of the room, feeling that there is no consolation I can offer. The woman who had been crying earlier comes out and washes her hands and face. We speak of the anguish of the little family and then I ask her why she is leaving Iraq.

'My husband runs the Meridian, [one of



KAREN ROBINSON / FORMAT

the hotels where we had seen the family silver on sale]. He has managed hotels in many parts of the world, including America and Italy. In America, I worked for the (she searched for the word in English) International Monetary Fund. Today, my husband earns 100,000 Iraqi dinar – about $45 – a month.

'Quite simply, we cannot afford to live, so I am going to Amman to look for work. I'll take anything and try to find an apartment so that my husband can join me. I have had to pay 400,000 dinars in order to get a visa to leave. My husband will have to pay the same. My sons would like to come too but one is a doctor and one an engineer – their exit visas cost three million dinars, so this is impossible.'

The Iraqi Government imposed the taxes on those wishing to leave the country some two years ago, when it became clear that many skilled professionals were going, often reluctantly, to try and earn a living elsewhere. Jordan is packed with Iraqi refugees, some desperate and penniless, most unable to leave and technically forbidden to work. Rumour has it that some Iraqi officer's wives have been forced into prostitution, but no-one speaks of this openly.

The woman's face is still puffy from crying as we walk out into the glare of the desert sunshine; she is eager to tell her story, to show how cosmopolitan her family had been and perhaps to stave off a little the loneliness of the coming months. In other circumstances she would be winding down, looking forward to retirement with her family around her. Instead she is setting off on her own, trying to start a new life in a strange city.

The daughter was burnt to death. I wonder if the little boy was a witness

'It is difficult for me to travel alone like this,' she adds, as if reading my thoughts. 'And even more difficult to stay by myself. In New York I had no problem but in the Middle East it is not considered acceptable for a woman to go unchaperoned. But what can I do?'

As we climb back into the coach she offers me some apple cake she has baked herself and then snuggles back into the pillow she has brought from home.

The desert continues to flash past, monotonous and unbroken save for the occasional herd of sheep, probably heading for the border where they can be smuggled over and sold for a good price.

Then we are nearly at the border ourselves. We fill up with Iraq's worthless petrol once again; the driver collects all the passports, and we lug our bags to a queue. It is around 8.00pm. So far the journey has taken six hours.

While we are waiting the sheikh comes up and asks where I am from. 'Welcome,' he says solemnly. 'I lived in Kuwait for 30 years. I worked for the airline company there. But then during the War I fled to Iraq. My sisters are in Kuwait and I haven't seen them for nine years. We can't phone Kuwait from Iraq (forbidden under UN sanctions) so I try to come every few months and phone from Amman. An expensive phone call, wouldn't you say, with the exit visa it costs 500,000 dinars a time. But how else can I speak with my family?'

Bags thoroughly searched, we get back on the bus. And wait... and wait... and wait. People exchange gossip, jokes and pistachio nuts. 'They have found some gold bracelets...' The whisper goes around.

At around 2.00am the small woman I noticed earlier struggles onto the bus, looking exhausted, and we are off, past the posters of the President and into no-man's land. We are in Jordan; posters this time of the late King Hussein of Jordan and his successor, King Abdullah. Separate body and handbag searches for men and women. I go off to get a Jordanian visa – $40 for Brits, $53 for Americans, $58 for Russians, $20 for Irish, $15 for French. Each person has their price.

Then into a small hall crowded with people. Passports handed in again – and another long wait. I find myself standing next to Hassana, the small woman with the gold problem. She speaks good English. She is from Basra, and explains matter-of-factly that she has breast cancer, which she suspects is a consequence of the radiation from the bombs dropped during the Gulf War. She is visiting her sister, a British-qualified gynaecologist living in Portland, Oregon, who is going to help her get treatment. 'I am very angry with my other sister in Basra. She hid two gold bangles in my luggage without telling me. They were for my nieces in the US, given to them when they were babies. Now they have been confiscated and I will never see them again and what is more all the people on the coach are angry with me.' She is clearly distressed.

At that point my name is called to collect my passport and I then go off to find the coach and a cup of hot tea from a cafe with a mangy cat and not much else.

Some of the passengers are already sleeping on the coach so I get in and try to doze. Time passes, and I realize that everyone has arrived except the woman with cancer. She finally staggers on at 4.00am; she was so distressed that she thought she had lost her passport and all her papers when in fact she had hidden them in her handbag, but it took more than two hours to find them.

We finally set off, stopping at 7.00am for the drivers to have breakfast. Whenever I wake from a restless doze, I see the current driver (one is thin, one is fat) looking as though he is nodding off. We have several stomach-churning near-misses. At the side of the road is the grim evidence of those who have not been so lucky; shredded tyres, bits of broken metal and occasionally a huge dark stain next to a crippled tanker; the driver presumably engulfed in flames. The lack of spare parts is another effect of the sanctions, causing untold numbers of accidents.

Filling up at the border: Iraqi petrol costs less than bottled water.

CAROLINE PENN / PANOS PICTURES

The Jordanian desert here is extraordinary; it looks like a moonscape, or a scene from a long-dead volcanic eruption. The contrast with the outskirts of Amman is stark; but perhaps less shocking than the feeling that here at last is a 'normal' place'; there are factories, cars, students heading for university – things are new, not patched and shabby. And, strangely, there are smartly dressed soldiers everywhere; in trucks, exercising and drilling in camps on the roadside. This feels much more of a military state than Iraq ever did.

By the time we arrive at the coach station, the journey has taken 22 hours. There is just time to catch the plane. Stiff and exhausted, I drag my bag off the coach.

There is a tune ringing irritatingly in my muddled head and it takes me a while to work out what it is. It is the music from the video shown on the bus. The film? *The Titanic*. It seems an apt metaphor for a sinking country; the waves caused by the deliberate wilfulness of the world's leaders. And a symbol too of the people of Iraq, drowning through no fault of their own. ■

Voices in the wilderness

Nikki van der Gaag

speaks to the sanctions-busters.

THEY call themselves 'Voices in the Wilderness'. Their aim is to draw attention to the plight of the Iraqi people by breaking the sanctions; taking medical supplies and toys to Iraq and hand-delivering them to children's hospitals.

They do so despite the risk of prosecution – the maximum penalty is five years' imprisonment in Britain and 12 years plus a million dollars in fines in the US. Voices in the US has already been threatened with such a fine. On 3 December 1998, the US Treasury Department informed the organization of its intention to impose $163,000 in penalties for breach of sanctions. They had 30 days to pay, although to date nothing has happened.

I met the latest delegation – two Americans and three Brits – in a hotel in downtown Baghdad. The lobby reeked of petrol; cheaper than water and less precious, it was being used to clean the floor.

Andrea Needham, from the British delegation, explains how they work. 'We always make it very public that we are going to Iraq to break sanctions. We delivered a letter to the Prime Minister before leaving explaining exactly what we were going to do.'

Voices are welcomed by the Iraqis, but face a more mixed reception back home.

'People in the US aren't always friendly,' said Soyun Kim, a US delegate. We did a Peace Walk for Iraq in January. Along the way some people showed their support but others threw things at us. Two young men shouted "Bomb them!"'

All five said they would be prepared to go to prison in order to bring the plight of the Iraqi people to the attention of the world. Andrea and a colleague, Gabriel Carlyle, have already been arrested and imprisoned for protesting against the bombing of Iraq last December. In the US, six people were arrested on 15 June when they protested against the awarding of an honorary doctorate of law to Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State. They argued that such an award should not be given to someone who administers a foreign policy that violates international law and has caused the death of so many Iraqi civilians. ■

In Britain, Voices UK and CASI (addresses below) are helping to organize a petition against sanctions on Iraq.

VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS
A CAMPAIGN TO BREAK THE SANCTIONS ON IRAQ

VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

The delegation in Baghdad. From left to right: Andrea Needham, Soyun Kim, Jeff Guntzel, Joanne Baker, Simon Emdin.

CAMPAIGNING ORGANIZATIONS:

You can contact local groups through these main ones:

AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

Iraq Sanctions Medical Alert PO Box 7343, Wellington South. E-mail: ISMAG@hotmail.com Web:come.to/ISMAG **Peace Movement Aotearoa** PO Box 9314, Wellington. Tel: 04 382 8129. Fax: 04 382 8173. E-mail:pma@apc.org.nz Web: www.converge.org.nz/pma/iraqa.htm

AUSTRALIA

Campaign Against Militarism PO Box 186, Northbridge WA 6865 Tel: 08 9227 7880. E-mail: camperth@odyssey.apana.org.au

Gulf Peace Action Committee, Adelaide SA. E-mail:gulfpeace@writeme.com

BRITAIN

Campaign Against Depleted Uranium (CADU) c/o GMD CND, One World Centre, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2.Tel: 0161 834 8301. Fax: 0161 834 8187. E-mail: gmdcnd@gn.apc.org **Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq** (CASI) c/o Seb Wills, Clare College, Cambridge CB2 1TL. E-mail: cir20@cus.cam.ac.uk Web:linux.clare.cam.ac.uk/casi **Emergency Committee on Iraq** George Galloway MP, Room 501, 7 Millbank, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA. Tel: 0171 219 2874. Fax: 0171 219 2879. **Gulf Veterans and Families Association** c/o 4 Maspin Close, Kingswood, Hull HU7 3EF. Tel: 01482 833 812. Fax: 01482 833 816. **Voices in the Wilderness** 12 Trinity Road, London N2 8JJ. Tel/Fax 0181 444 1605. E-mail: voices@viwuk.freeserve.co.uk Web:www.nonviolence.org.vitw

CANADA

Campaign to End Sanctions Against the People of Iraq (CESAPI) 240 Holyrood Road, North Vancouver, BC V7N 2R5. Tel: 604 985 7147. Fax: 604 985 1260. dmorgan@web.net **The Global Movement to End the War against Iraq** c/o OPIRG McMaster, PO Box 1013, Mcmaster University, 1280 Main St West, Hamilton, Ont L8S 1CO. Tel: 905 525 9140 ext. 27289. Fax: 905 523 0107. Web:www.leb.net/globalmewi **Iraq Action Network Canada**, PO Box 40052, 75 King St S, Waterloo, Ont, N2J 4V1. **Objection de Conscience / Voices of Conscience** 8166 Henri-Julien, Montréal, Québec H2P 2J2. Tel: 514 858 7584. E-mail:object@colba.net or voices@colba.net

UNITED STATES

Houston Coalition to End the War on Iraq 1844 Kipling St, Houston, Texas. Tel: 713 524 2682 Web:www.houstonprogressive.org **International Action Center Anti-Sanctions Project** 39 W 14th St, #206; New York, NY, 10011. Tel: 212 633 6646. Fax 212 633 2889. E-mail: iacenter@iacenter.org **Iraq Action Coalition** 7309 Haymarket Ln, Raleigh, NC 27615. Tel: 919 848 7438. Fax: 919 846 7422. E-mail iac@leb.net Web: iraqaction.org **International Peace Project** 900 Mission Canyon Rd, Santa Barbara CA 93105.Tel: 805 569 3738. E-mail: MFKimball@aol.com **Voices in the Wilderness** 1460 West Carmen Ave, Chicago, IL 60640. Tel: 773 784 8065. Fax: 773 784 8837. E-mail: kkelly@igc.apc.org (see Britain for website).

READING

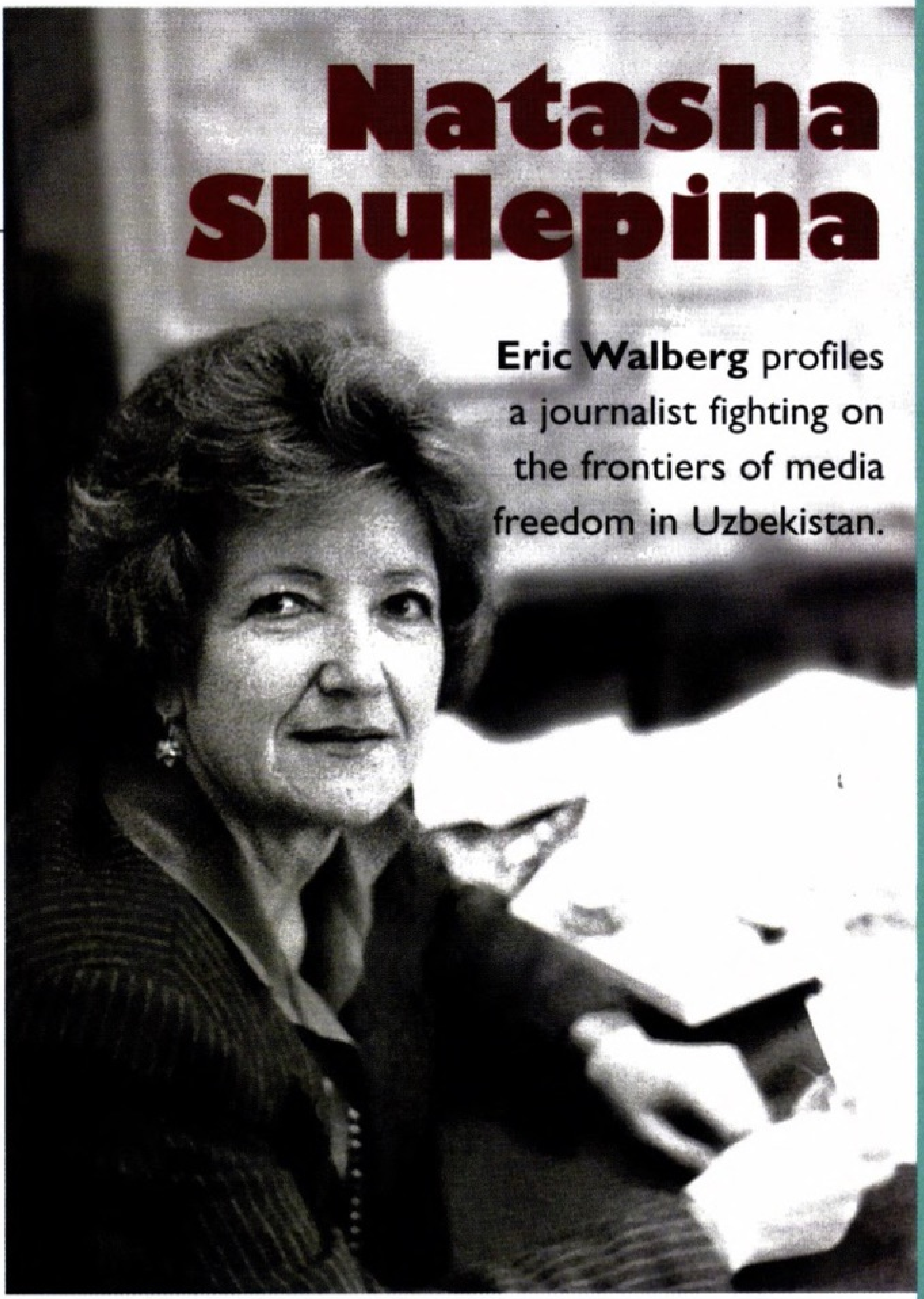
The Scourging of Iraq: Sanctions, Law and Natural Justice, Geoff Simons (Macmillan 1998). An angry book, but an invaluable reference tool. Simons has also written ***Iraq: Primus Inter Pariahs, a crisis chronology 1997-98*** (Macmillian 1999) which minutely charts the disputes between the US and Iraq that led to the expulsion of the weapons inspectors, and ***Imposing Economic Sanctions: Legal remedy or genocidal tool?*** (Pluto,1999) looking at sanctions worldwide and their implications, as well as ***Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam*** (Macmillan 1996) which goes back 10,000 years! Sarah Graham-Brown's ***Sanctioning Saddam: the Politics of Intervention*** (IB Tauris,1999) is a thorough and detailed analysis of the politics of economic sanctions. It includes material on the Kurds. For those wishing to look in more detail at Kurdish issues, David McDowall's definitive ***A Modern History of the Kurds*** (IB Tauris 1997) is a must. For an historical view, ***The Fire this Time*** by former US Attorney-General Ramsey Clark (Thunders Mouth Press, updated 1994) gives a searing analysis of Gulf War propaganda, as does ***Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War*** by John R Macarthur (University of California Press, 1993). For more information on depleted uranium, read ***Metal of Dishonour: how the Pentagon radiates soldiers and civilians with DU weapons*** (International Action Center).

Journals: ***Gulf States Newsletter*** Box 124, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 3YT. Tel: 01342 712 929. Fax: 01342 712 829. Web:www.gulfstates.co.uk ***Middle East International*** 21 Collingham Road, London SW5 ONU. Tel: 0171 373 5228. Fax: 0171 370 5956. UK e-mail: steve@meiuk.u-net.com US E-mail astaats.his.com ***Middle East Report*** MERIP, 1500 Mass Ave NW, Suite 119, Washington DC 20005. Web:www.merip.org

The **NI** Interview

Natasha Shulepina

Eric Walberg profiles a journalist fighting on the frontiers of media freedom in Uzbekistan.



VLADIMIR PARTNOV

Quiet crusader

NATASHA Shulepina was born with journalism in her blood. A dynamic, upbeat Russian, single and energetic, she is on almost all counts an anomaly in this highly traditional society – a society that is 80 per cent Uzbek and Muslim. She works for the paper *Pravda Vostoka* (Truth of the East), where her beat is economic, health, environmental and social matters. She is a thorn in the side of the authorities yet was awarded last year's government-sponsered *Shuhrat* (renown) award. Natasha has a friendly and open face and is a careful listener, putting you immediately at ease. When she speaks her words flow quickly and passionately, leaving you groping to follow the carefully catalogued details filed away in her mind. Her writing is a bit long-winded – probably a holdover from the Soviet days when it was wise to bury any criticism deep in the third column of your story.

Her exposés – at least those that get past the ever-vigilant censor – provide a fascinating look at how the wheels get greased in a society where the press must serve the state. Controversial material – sometimes even whole articles – are removed, but if a controversy does make it into print it often appears the same day on the appropriate official's desk for corrective action. Writing here has an impact that journalists in the West might well envy.

Uzbekistan is at the heart of Central Asia, but it has been cut off from rest of the world since the decline of the Silk Road trading route some three centuries ago. Today President Islam Karimov rules with no public opposition to the political and economic direction of post-Soviet Uzbekistan. While nominally democratic, modern Uzbekistan's political culture is in fact shaped by traditional clan-based hierarchies with strong unopposed leaders. Natasha is careful to steer clear of party politics or criticizing the president.

I was curious why Natasha didn't follow the exodus of other Russians after independence. 'I was born here, as were my father and grandmother,' she protests. 'This is my homeland, and though there are many problems, I feel they are my problems. Russians settled here more than a century ago. The Soviet period, for all its faults, left a lot of positive things – universal education, equality for women and minorities, at least in theory,' she adds with a smile, 'The backlash against Russians in the early years of independence petered out quickly. People realize Russia is a window on the West. If we're not to sink into a fratricidal or religious war like Tadjikistan or Afghanistan, we must see our minorities as an asset, not a liability. While I'm Russian by birth, I consider myself an internationalist living in a multicultural society. With open borders and the Internet, the whole world is our society now.'

> ***I consider myself an internationalist living in a multicultural society. With open borders and the Internet, the whole world is our society now***

I wondered about the role of the press in this difficult period. 'It's vital to act as a watch dog. After the years of stagnation, we are faced with a situation where the rules are constantly changing, where money can lead us down a slippery slope. For instance, there is a serious problem of land grabbing now. It's very easy to grease a bureaucrat's palm, and then do whatever you like. A massive antenna appeared mysteriously atop an apartment building. Residents complained to me so I wrote an article called "Who owns the roofs?" We forced the local *khokimiat* (city council) to order the cellular phone company to remove it. Then there was the construction site that appeared in the courtyard of a quiet apartment complex. The shady yard where women hung their wash out and children chased soccer balls was turned into a two-storey office building, leaving residents barely room to move. The local *khokimiat* had decided it was theirs. *Pravda Vostoka* contacted the chief city architect, who hadn't approved the building and refused to because of danger from earthquakes. The newspaper exposed the situation and the building was actually torn down.'

One of Natasha's main tasks is to expose the Soviet-era environmental skeletons. While the disastrous Aral Sea situation gets all the headlines, Tashlak, in the Fergana valley, recently got national coverage thanks to Natasha's efforts. The petrochemical industry there was the pride and joy of the Soviet era. But an oil spill at an old refinery dumped 300,000 tons of oil over a fifteen-year period. The water has been undrinkable ever since. A woman who lit a torch to peer into an old well in search of water inadvertently set it on fire. Natasha's exposé last September resulted in the Deputy Prime Minister issuing a resolution the next day demanding a clean-up and assistance to the local population.

The rush to build new industry all-too-often means ecological expertise is sidelined. The challenge of the press is crucial here. A new oil refinery in Bukhara was built on geologically unstable land. Ground water, very close to the surface, is already polluted with oil. *Pravda Vostoka* published a critical article in August. That same day company management held a meeting, brought in local state ecological and geological experts and committed itself to cleaning up its act.

'We had to fight to get these articles published because of the toes that got stepped on, but actions were taken immediately as a result. The press is the only vehicle for alerting the bureaucracy that things are not as they claim. Without us, the risk of instability and social crisis would be much higher. Of course it would be better not to worry about censorship but that's not the only problem. Officials are very reluctant to be interviewed or give out any information. It's partly a matter of tradition, both Asian and Soviet. But sometimes it's because they really do have something to hide. I don't see myself as a crusader. The society is moving forward cautiously, so steps are gradual.'

No heroes, but then the world is made up of small people who are doing their best under the circumstances. ■

Reviews

music

Vetse
by **Njava**
(EMI Hemisphere 7243 4 99265 CD)

D
by **Tarika**
(Sakay SAKD 7034 CD)

Exotica
by **David Toop**
(Serpent's Tail, ISBN 1 85242 595 4)

Tarika: mixing East African rhythms with Latin spirit.

The Malagasy like to dance: they dance with the living; they dance with the dead. Music provides a thread that links the quick to the spirits and it is this, the sense that sound is integral to life, that Tarika's **D** and Njava's **Vetse** convey. 'D' even stands for 'dihy', the island's word for dance; 'Vetse', on the other hand, means to share.

On the surface, both Tarika and Njava share a lot: the skittering melodies played out by highly-strung guitar and *marovany*; the unmistakable East African rhythms and songs as spirited as Latin dance tunes. The break comes in the content: Tarika, as well-known for their acclaimed album *Son Egal* as for their former incarnation as folk band Tarika Samy, have used **D** to reclaim dance tunes from the 1970s and 1980s, a golden age when each of Madagascar's 18 tribes practised their own unique rhythms. With Hanitra's beguiling voice leading them on, the result is an intricate rhythmic weave that just sails out into the evening summer air.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

Njava, however, are travelling in the opposite direction. A quintet which started out performing at ceremonies such as trance rituals and circumcisions, they are staking their pitch for more modern sound. Consequently, **Vetse** is a varied album: the beautiful opener, 'Paory', shows a contemplative side; others some riotous times with ancestral party animals. In all cases, **Vetse** is anchored in a past unthreatened by gradual change.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

Of course, however much we enjoy these records, it will never be with the same meaning that their Malagasy fans can bring to them. Tarika's 'Ilahikolo' – an ancestor dance that refers to one of the island's favourite pastimes of bringing out your (dead) relatives for a party – stands little chance of being regarded with anything other than macabre fascination by western audiences. This is in spite of the fact that for Malagasis the ceremony is a joyous occasion. So what do we get from these records? This is a topic raised in David Toop's wonderfully provocative book, **Exotica**. Toop sets up a polemic that takes him on a worldwide journey: Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Willie Colón, Hawaiian rappers Boo-yah Tribe and the sad tale of Carmen Miranda are just four of his stops. Probably alone amongst contemporary music writers, Toop is actually a curator of sound: a polymath with an intense and unaffected interest in music and its place in the world. At times his prose has a dreamlike quality to it, perhaps a necessity when dealing with the light jazz with added bird song and fake-Polynesian twangs of Martin Denny. Toop is spot-on in his analysis of stress-busting New Age music and scathing towards those who collect music like a tourist's mementos. For him, music, and more particularly sound, is a thing of infinite power. A superb book.

Politics ☆☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆☆ LG

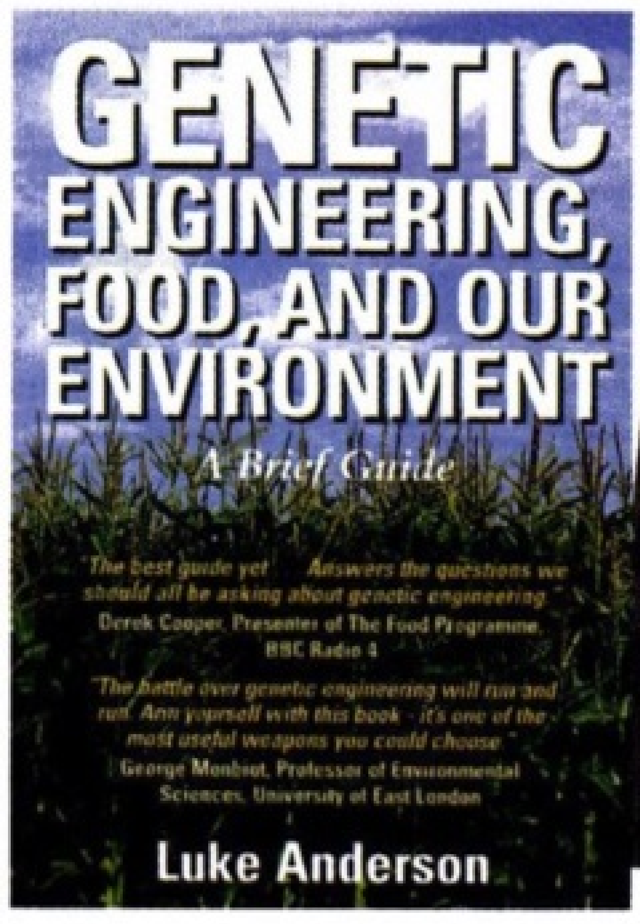
books

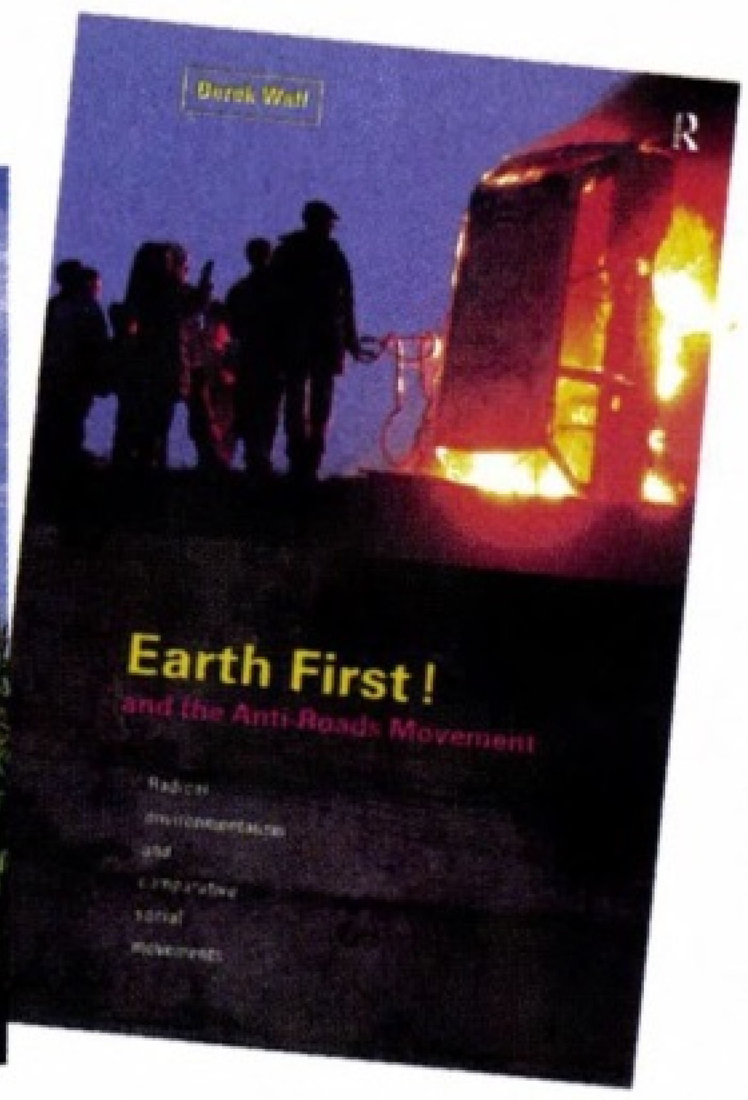
Genetic Engineering, Food, and Our Environment
by **Luke Anderson**.
(Green Books ISBN 1-870098 78 1)

Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement
by **Derek Wall**
(Routledge ISBN 0 415 19064 9)

SchNews: Survival Handbook
(Justice? ISBN 0 952 974827)

Rethinking Green Politics
by **John Barry**
(Sage ISBN 7619 5606 9)


GENETIC ENGINEERING, FOOD, AND OUR ENVIRONMENT
A Brief Guide
'The best guide yet ... Answers the questions we should all be asking about genetic engineering' Derek Cooper, Presenter of The Food Programme, BBC Radio 4
'The battle over genetic engineering will run and run. Arm yourself with this book - it's one of the most useful weapons you could choose' George Monbiot, Professor of Environmental Sciences, University of East London
Luke Anderson


Derek Wall
R
Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement
Radical environmentalism and comparative social movements

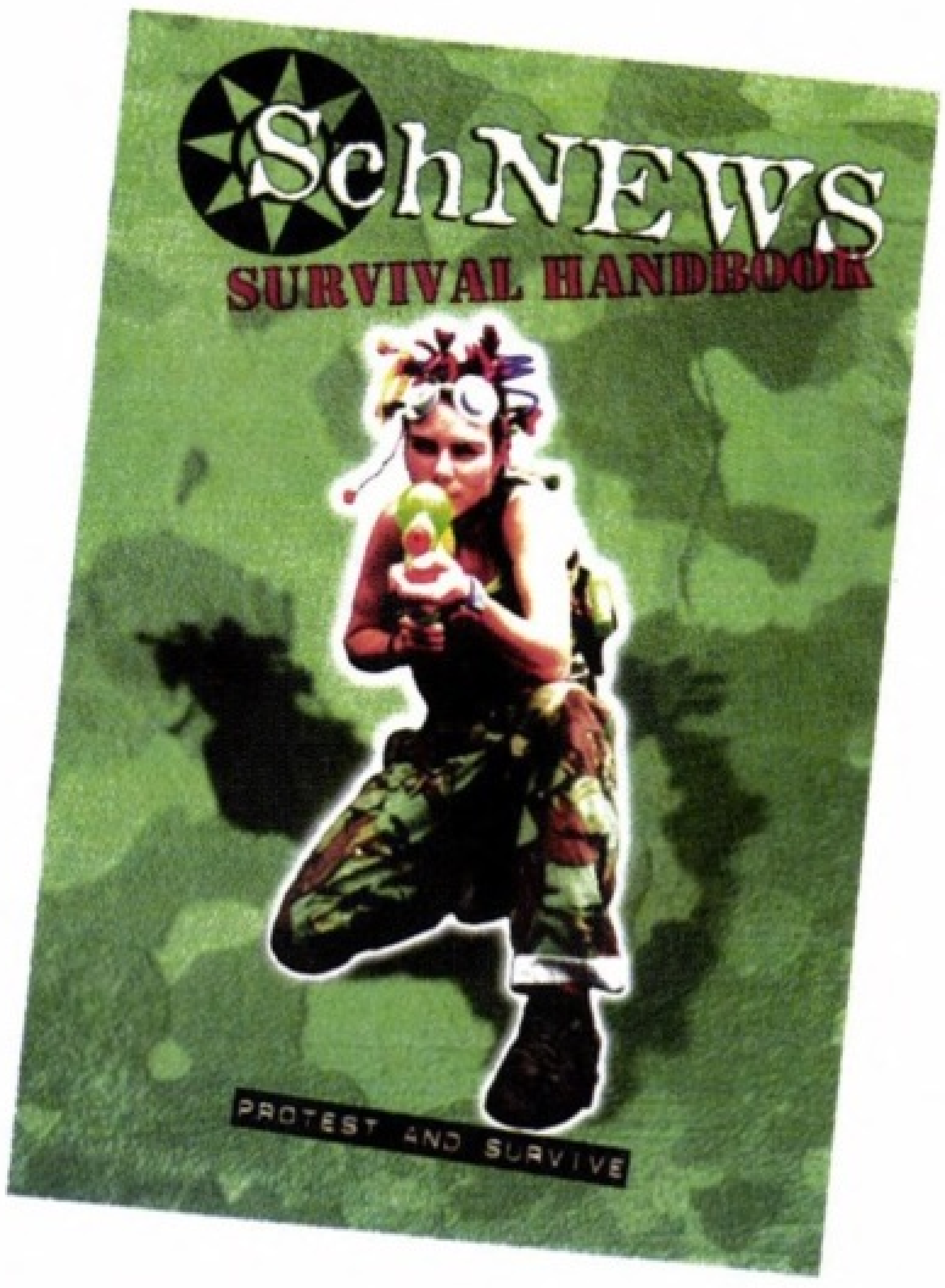
Brevity is the sister of talent, as Chekhov said. And Luke Anderson's genuinely brief guide to **Genetic Engineering, Food and Our Environment** proves the point. This clear, concise, inexpensive little book is absolutely useful. Assuming nothing, it starts, helpfully, by answering the question: what is a gene? What follows is a calm, step-by-step, factual and informative guide through this political minefield of a subject. The quotes – and there are many of them – from various scientists, occupying positions on both sides of the debate, are instructive. But most entertaining – in a chilling sort of way – are the words of the GM corporations themselves. The boast from Monsanto's agricultural section co-President, Robert T Franley, on the company's control over 87 per cent of the US cottonseed market, speaks volumes. 'This is not just consolidation of seed companies, it's really consolidation of the entire food chain'. Er... thank you for that bit of information, Monsanto. E-mail: greenbooks@gn.apc.org

Politics ☆☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

The irony of ultra-radical Earth First! activists singing the praises of mobile phones, camcorders, the Internet and other symbols of capitalist accumulation, is not lost on Derek Wall in his book about the controversial eco-activist movement. Importantly, Wall declares his initial hostility to the movement, quoting his own 1990 assessment of them as 'right-wing' neo-Malthusians who praised AIDS and famine as ways of reducing human numbers. But Earth First! has changed, says Wall, having rejected right-wing politics and the more extreme forms of 'ecotage' and having moved to the Left. Indeed, Wall's **Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement** is almost a paean in its homage, combining gritty first-hand accounts of direct actions and an academic's analysis of the position of such activism within the broader political context. This makes for a rather chalk-and-cheese affair, that may have some readers skipping over the especially heavy reference-ridden chunks, and others gliding over the lightweight anecdotal bits, depending on predilection. Skilfully woven this book is not, but it has got an appropriately intelligent, anarchic energy about it.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

SchNews: Survival Handbook does not bother too much with heavy-duty analysis or academic credibility. But it's first-rate activist fare, offering regular columns such as 'Crap Arrest of the Week'. The book is a shameless recycling of copies of *SchNews*, emanating from the British seaside town of Brighton. But there's nothing wrong with that. Wide-ranging, hard-hitting and rude – 'the MAI is a multinational's wet dream' – yells one cross-head, it has flashes of a quirkier humour too: 'information is your weapon' blazes a title page – above a drawing of a custard pie. E-mail: schnews@brighton.co.uk



Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

Sitting at quite the opposite end of the scale is John Barry's **Rethinking Green Politics**. Theoretical, academic and conciliatory in approach, he kicks off by saying that green politics has 'an established perspective in political and moral debates', that it is no longer 'immature'. Barry's argument is above all ethical; his concern is to put the idea of 'ecological virtue' high up on the mainstream political agenda at both a national and international level. 'The transnational character of green citizenship can be taken as a political expression of the increased ecologically based interdependence that creates a new relationship between otherwise unconnected individuals.' Hard to take issue with the sentiment behind that.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆

STAR RATING

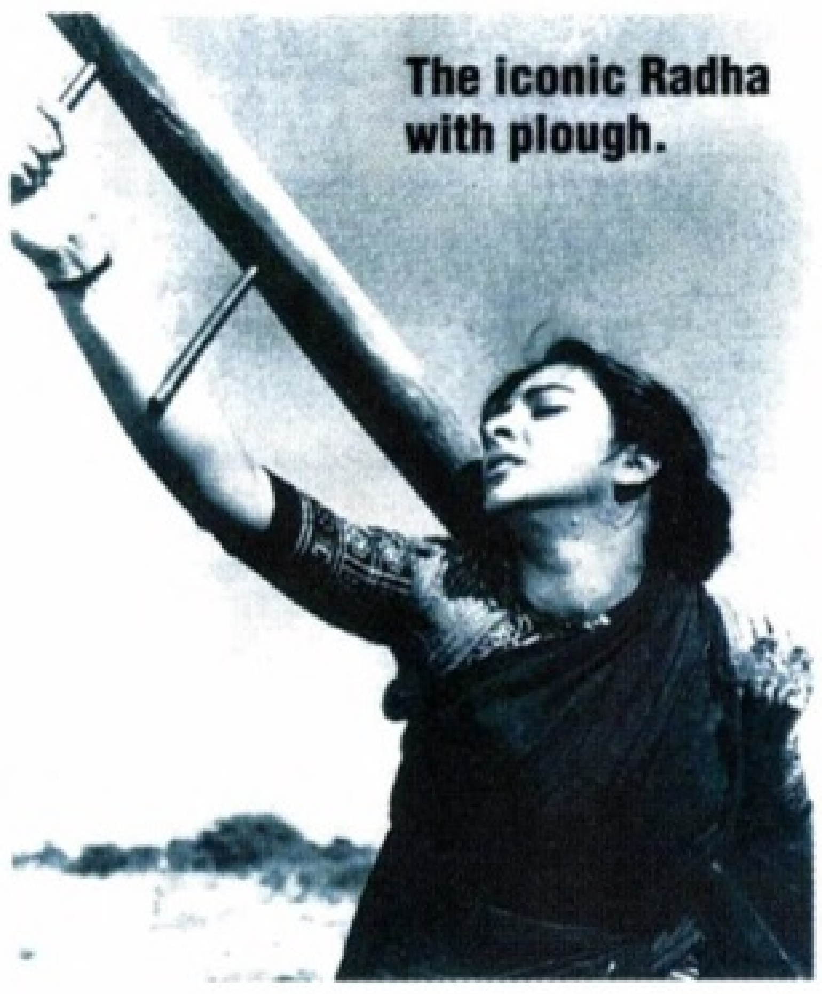
Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Mother India

... being the film at the pinnacle of Indian popular cinema history.

When it was released in 1957, **Mother India** (***Bharat Mata***) was hailed as an instant classic, India's *Gone with the Wind*. The concept of the mother as the guardian of the soil and soul of the nation contained in the Hindi term 'Bharat Mata', was already profoundly significant to the Indian popular consciousness. Even so, the film's critical and popular reception exceeded all expectations.

It owed its success in no small part to the powerful sense of audience identification with the suffering of the mother figure at its centre. Played with exemplary skill by Nargis, who occupies a hallowed position in the Indian film pantheon, her performance suggested the very essence of noble self-sacrifice, womanly devotion, and adherence to the social and moral order. But the film's conservative values, profound though they were, were also deceptive, since it exhibited a clever interplay – artistically and politically – between the traditional and the radical.


The iconic Radha with plough.

Produced in the early years of Nehru's socialist experiment and a decade after independence, it was a remake of director Mehboob Khan's own 1940 black-and-white classic *Aurat*. This, filmed in a village in rural Bengal not far from where Khan grew up, told the tale of a shy young bride, Radha, arriving to live with her husband and mother-in-law only to discover the extent of the family's indebtedness to the village moneylender.

The opening sequence of **Mother India** shows tractors and cranes churning a landscape as parched as the now elderly Radha's complexion, while in the foreground she is urged by local dignitaries to inaugurate an irrigation canal. Clearly a survivor, she is revered by the villagers. But looking back over her life of tragedy she is made to symbolize both the country's traditional moral values and its drive towards progress and development – a new ideological twist in the post-independence era remake.

Although Mehboob Khan cited Cecil B De Mille as his Hollywood idol, stylistically his film draws from several different traditions. Certainly **Mother India** belongs first and foremost to the popular Indian cinema – there are even muted song-and-dance sequences and the storyline is straightforward melodrama – but it successfully amalgamates this with both Soviet social-realist techniques and an epic Hollywood sweep. The film's most enduring image is of Radha – her ox having died from overwork – captured in profile, carrying a plough along her back. This is an image of iconic heroism straight out of Soviet poster art.

The pivotal moment in the plot comes when Radha's husband suffers an agricultural accident, losing both arms in the process. Unable to bear being a burden to his family, he slips out of their lives. When the mother-in-law promptly dies and Radha's two babies are killed in a flood, she must act to save her surviving children's lives. Her face and body caked in mud from the flood, she presents herself at the moneylender Sukhilala's door, prepared to submit to his repeated requests for sexual favours in return for food. But before she makes her sacrifice, she receives what she interprets as a sign that her husband is still alive, and she roundly beats her persecutor instead.

This is not the act of a wholly powerless woman. Indeed Radha's subtle transformation from more-or-less mute, submissive wife to an independently powerful mother, reflects the way the film discreetly disrupts female stereotypes. Traditionally, wives are seen as eternally self-sacrificing, and although mothers are given a greater degree of expressive autonomy, they are frequently models of piety. Radha is far from being a straightforward paragon of religious virtue. She evolves in the film's second half into a complex older woman, by turns sprightly, by turns truculent, her devotion to her two grown-up sons taking on almost incestuous overtones. Indeed, psychoanalytic underpinnings also surface with the characterization of the second son Birju, who as a little boy is all mischief and irrepressibility, but who as an adult becomes wayward, his energy transforming into aggression. Eventually banished from the village, he becomes an outlaw, his main redeeming feature being his unwavering adoration of his mother. Returning to the village to abduct the moneylender's daughter on her wedding day, Birju is confronted by his own mother who threatens to shoot him if he doesn't release the girl. Fatally wounded, Birju embraces his mother, then expires.

Radha's final overwhelming act of sacrifice can be seen as a revolutionary gesture on behalf of women's solidarity. More frequently, however, audiences see the killing of the bad son as a way of restoring the natural order. Whichever view comes out on top, there's no denying the film's enormous emotional resonance. **Mother India** remains at the very pinnacle of Indian popular film history and it's hard to deny, despite its occasional faults, that it deserves its position. ■

by **Esi Eshun**

Mother India (***Bharat Mata***), directed by **Mehboob Khan**, was released in 1957.

Reviews

film

ALISON MURRAY

Kamal Bamadhaj with East Timorese in Dili, shortly before he was killed.

Punitive Damage

directed by **Annie Goldson**

Aotearoa/New Zealand does not have an honourable record when it comes to East Timor. Since its annexation in 1975 by the Indonesian military regime, successive Aotearoa/New Zealand governments have maintained that the situation is 'irreversible' and have refused to act on well documented claims that over 200,000 East Timorese have died as a direct result of the occupation.

As recent changes in the region have meant that Indonesia may, at last, be willing to grant autonomy to the East Timorese, Aotearoa has committed resources to help monitor the first 'free' elections in Timor – for many people a case of much too little, far too late. **Punitive Damage**, is then, a timely reminder of what many New Zealanders and their Government still fail to acknowledge.

The story of Kamal Bamadhaj, a New Zealand citizen who was murdered in the 1991 Santa Cruz Cemetery massacre, this film seeks to tell a number of stories about East Timor, international politics and the human toll that is exacted by events like this. As the title indicates, the documentary is driven by Helen Todd, Kamal's mother, and her struggle to get Kamal's death recognized in a US court of law.

Inevitably, though, this is a larger story and the success of the documentary is bound up with director Annie Goldson's willingness to carefully account for other narrative strands. Kamal's death is our entry-point into the suffering of an entire country and people who have experienced the intentional killing of at least a third of the pre-invasion population. As Helen Todd notes, to her and the film's credit, if the pain experienced by one mother living outside the country is so great, how much worse must it be for the East Timorese, experiencing a systematic, brutal campaign against their rights for freedom and suffering losses too large to imagine?

Punitive Damage is no ordinary story of a westerner killed in a foreign country who then becomes a symbol of all that is wrong in the world, while the indigenous, non-western people remain unnoticed. Goldson's film focuses on Kamal because as a New Zealander he bridges the gap between his country and East Timor. It shows western audiences what the implications are if we pretend we don't know and are not partly responsible for what takes place elsewhere.

In the end Kamal is just an ordinary young person who chose to act and this is the heart of **Punitive Damage**. As Kamal wrote in his final diary entry the day before he was killed: 'Whether independence or total genocide occurs in East Timor depends not only on the remarkably powerful will of the East Timorese, but on the will of humanity, of all of us'.

Politics ☆☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ MC

Reviewers: **Louise Gray, Manu Caddie, Vanessa Baird**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

The **NI** Crossword

36 by **Axe**

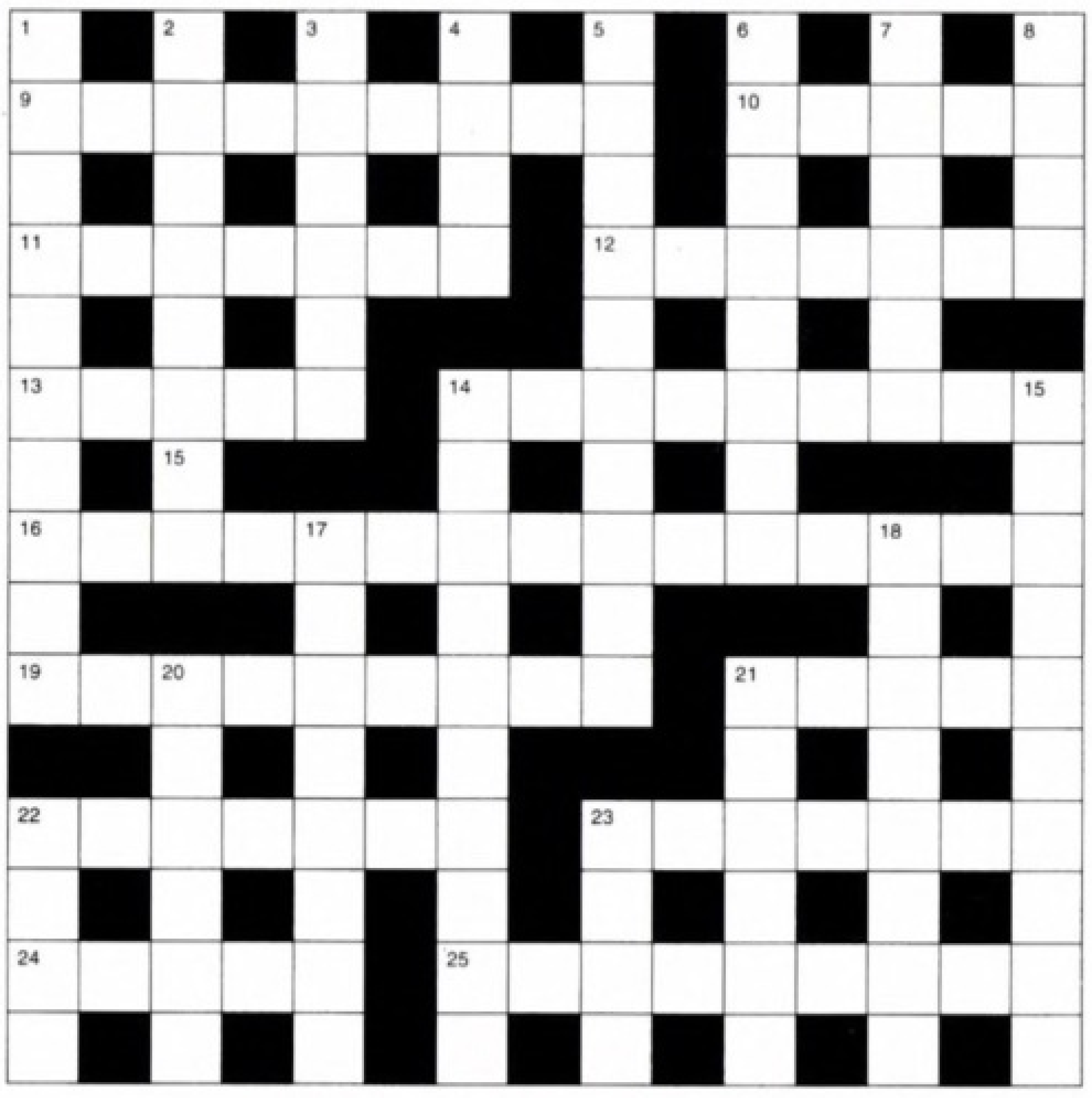
CRYPTIC

Across

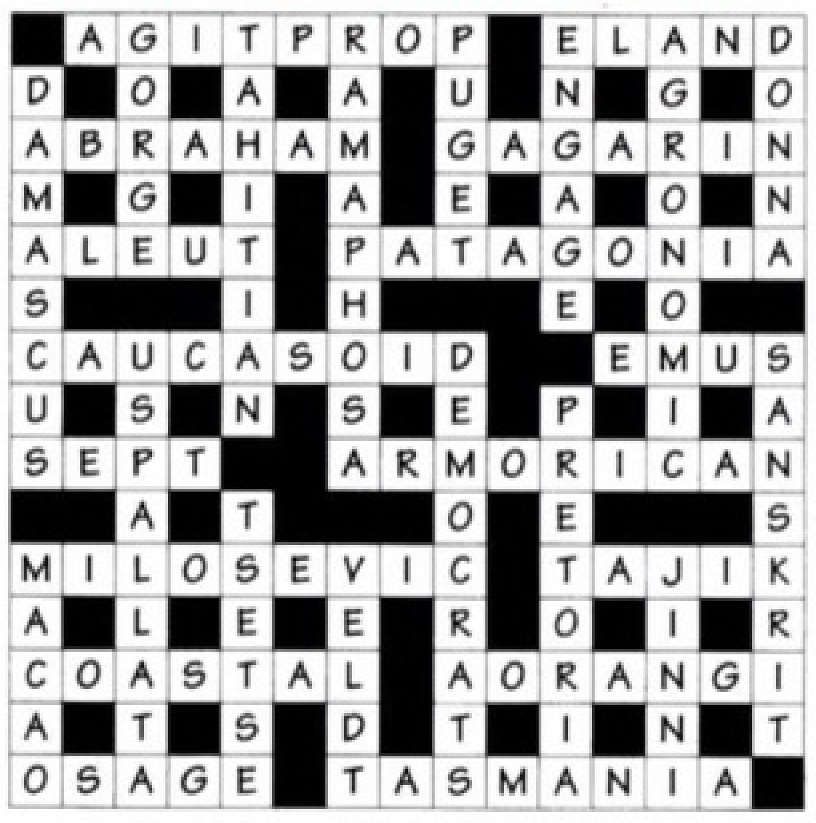
- **9** Viking calumny yours truly first reported (9)
- **10** Where in France a Rolls Royce gets a first service... (5)
- **11** ...and where New York finally gets petroleum company (7)
- **12** Folk song about the country (7)
- **13** Djibouti in the old days way off course along with Issas (5)
- **14** Place somewhere in Kent girl's accent (9)
- **16** Dissenters a real problem for Pacific inhabitants (6,9)
- **19** Newspapers seem all at sea about 23's wife and mother, for example (9)
- **21** Last Chinese 23's family got at, unceremoniously thrown out of Chittagong (5)
- **22** US summit is wetter (7)
- **23** Quiet concerto following Beethoven's Fifth? (7)
- **24** I got into headgear I needed for the country (5)
- **25** Disappointing Carmen aria doesn't have right character for this part of the world (9)

Down

- **1** Leasing she arranged for some Sri Lankans (10)
- **2** Cats from 8 (8)
- **3** These people note ten children outside (6)
- **4** A feature of aerated dynamics is a whirlpool (4)
- **5** Animals are fleet with no tail, so ill otherwise (10)
- **6** Italian citizen's mean and falsifies names... (8)
- **7** ...to hire within this town (6)
- **8** A silicon-aluminium primal land mass (4)
- **14** Sea-spout is unspectacular (10)
- **15** Old Berliner puts Garmisch first in holiday run (4,6)
- **17** Mistakenly cite emir as anti-social (8)
- **18** Flag-waving concerning an African (8)
- **20** Pine needle found about Cambodian mining centre (6)
- **21** Old Church choose all-round leader ((6)
- **22** Rhine headwaters' upper reaches initially reverse this water-flow (4)
- **23** The perfect garden? (4)



Last month's solution



■	A	G	I	T	P	R	O	P	■	E	L	A	N	D
D	■	O	■	A	■	A	■	U	■	N	■	G	■	O
A	B	R	A	H	A	M	■	G	A	G	A	R	I	N
M	■	G	■	I	■	A	■	E	■	A	■	O	■	N
A	L	E	U	T	■	P	A	T	A	G	O	N	I	A
S	■	■	■	I	■	H	■	■	■	E	■	O	■	■
C	A	U	C	A	S	O	I	D	■	■	E	M	U	S
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S	E	P	T	■	■	A	R	M	O	R	I	C	A	N
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C	O	A	S	T	A	L	■	A	O	R	A	N	G	I
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O	S	A	G	E	■	T	A	S	M	A	N	I	A	■

QUICK

Across

- **9** Islander of Nordic heritage (9)
- **10** Town of northern France and a kind of tapestry fabric named after it (5)
- **11** Former French province, now part of the region of Aquitaine (7)
- **12** Country of the Caucasus, once a constituent republic of the Soviet Union (7)
- **13** The French territory of ------- and Issas: before the independent Djibouti in 1977 (5)
- **14** County town of Kent, England (9)
- **16** Inhabitants of Polynesian Rapa Nui, administered by Chile since 1888 (6,9)
- **19** Victoria and Eugenie, for example (9)
- **21** The last Manchu dynasty in the Wade-Giles transliteration, overthrown in 1912 (5)
- **22** The 26th prince of the House of Grimaldi (1950-)
- **23** Variety of moth and penguin (7)
- **24** The world's first free black republic (1804)
- **25** Characteristic of a continent, or more accurately here, a country (9)

Down

- **1** Majority of the population of Sri Lanka (10)
- **2** Citizens of an ancient empire of western Asia (8)
- **3** Members of a tribe of North Germans, originally to be found around the Elbe estuary (6)
- **4** Current which runs back against the 14 (5)
- **5** Edentates of South America, protected by bony plates (10)
- **6** Italian hard cheese (8)
- **7** Italian name for site of ecumenical church councils 1545-1563, defining the Counter-Reformation (6)
- **8** The biggest continent in both area and population (4)
- **14** Middle-of-the-road, average (10)
- **15** Iron Curtain country citizen until 1990 (4,6)
- **17** Describing a (religious) recluse (8)
- **18** Inhabitant of Africa, independent in 1993 (8)
- **20** Major source of rubies and sapphires in western Cambodia, on the Thai border near Battambang (6)
- **21** Egyptian Church founded by St Mark, but isolated from the rest of Christendom in 451 (6)
- **22** Industrial valley of western Germany (4)
- **23** Biblical paradise (4)

ENDPIECE

I started it

The diary of entertainer **Eric Nagler**, written while he was on a concert tour of Bosnia, records that the truth is not always the first casualty of war.

THESE kids are eating up the show. We're all loving making music together. They seem starved for any kind of fun and silliness.

Earlier we visited a small 'collection centre', where refugees are brought to be relocated but wind up staying. We got the projector working and showed videos to some 50 people, all Kosovars. And then I played.

Edo, my translator, was the perfect straight-faced foil to my antics. He translated my English into Bosnian, then a local man converted his words into Albanian. The height of absurdity was teaching the audience to speak Chicken through two translators. When we were done with the song, at least we had Chicken as a common language. It is just this kind of absurdity that these dislocated people need, to take them away from the miseries of daily life.

In Sarajevo there is no direction you can look without seeing bombed-out buildings, derelict hotels and office towers. The devastation in the countryside bears a remarkable resemblance to Italy and Ireland, where I visited with awe the relics of ancient civilizations – the roofless houses, the castles with empty windows and crumbling walls. Here the scene is eerily similar, except the devastation is made by people, not time. The shape and size of houses haven't changed much over the millennia, and neither has what we do to them.

Ironically, this timeless apparition of war aroused in me the same anguish I felt absorbing the pristine charm of the impeccable Croatian coast. What shame. What shame to destroy such beauty. What shame that, no matter how old we grow, how civilized, how wise, we continue to insist on transforming our lives into misery.

Why do we do that? Oh I know, the Croats will blame the Serbs, the Christians will blame the Muslims – and vice versa. When you ask these people for a reason, they hark back to atrocities committed in the fifteenth century. How did humankind ever become cursed with this chronic 'you-started-it' disease?

Who started it? I started it. It keeps floating into my mind that the deeper you look into someone's eyes the more you see yourself.

Along the sidewalks of Sarajevo are decorative flower-shaped craters a few inches deep, about two feet across, with a spray of smaller pock marks covering another five feet. They are what happens when a projectile explodes on the pavement. My guide pointed to the distant hills where, during the war, the Serbian Army had been stationed. In the evening, he said, you could hear the soldiers singing as they sat and drank Slivovitz until it was shelling time. Their singing became the take-cover warning. Sarajevo underwent four years of shelling. After a while the artillery fire became like a minor annoyance. You heard the report of the cannon and looked up to the hills. If it wasn't coming your way you went about your business. At home you heard the grenades around you but you didn't put down your book. If one landed on your roof it might knock out the plumbing, or it might kill you. After three million rounds of bombardment, what the hell is the difference?

One day we drive out of Tuzla to a Serbian area which has only recently reverted to Bosnian territory. The local government is still Serb. In the midst of this district is a Muslim village.

In the school the children are all essentially Muslim refugees, their families chased out of their village during the war, to return years later to repair their burnt homes and resettle. The field beside the school was once a front line and scene of battle – we can see the dried-up irrigation ditches used as trenches. Now the returning Muslims are in a tense situation, back in their village, surrounded by people who don't want them there.

And yet, at our concert, the kids are bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, raring to go and irrepressible.

As we leave school, my translator confides in me that he feels sorry for those Muslim people.

'Why?' I ask him, guessing the answer. He is a Muslim converted to Christianity.

'Because they don't know the truth,' he says.

I feel it's this sort of 'knowledge' that paves the road which leads to war. War is run by those who know what's right. I find living in the question quite peaceful. ■

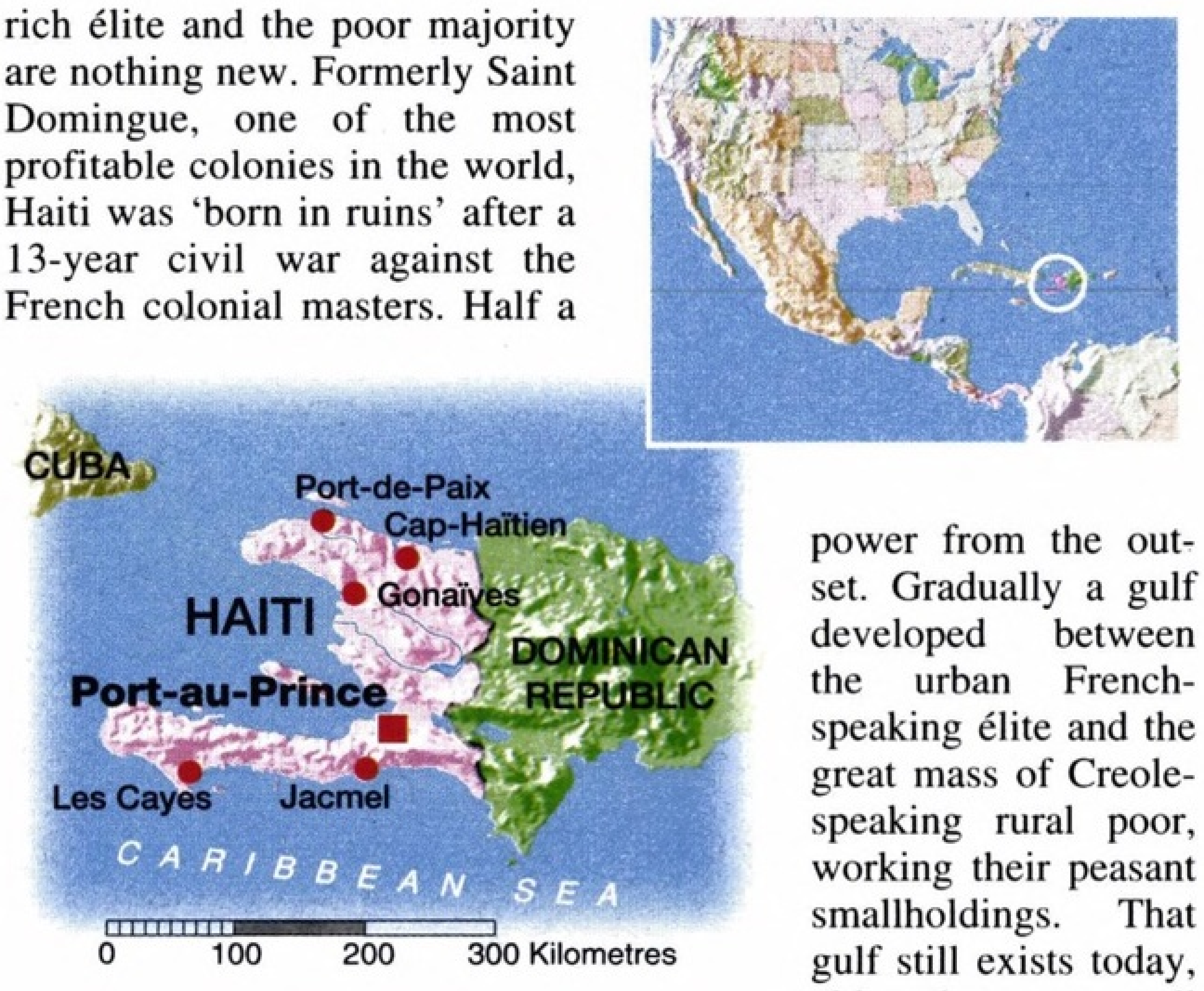
Eric Nagler grew up in New York and moved to Canada in 1968 as a conscientious objector. He is now one of Canada's most popular entertainers, well known for his TV work on *Eric's World* and *The Elephant Show*. He spent a month in Bosnia performing for war-affected children and families.

Country profile

Haiti

FROM the heights of Pétionville, the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince looks beautiful, especially in the early evening light. Haiti's wealthy few – mostly light-skinned and US-educated – live up in the cool mountain suburb, with French bistros and designer shops at hand. The view over the horseshoe bay is spectacular. But what is conveniently hidden from view below is the sheer squalor of one of the world's biggest shantytowns, Cité Soleil, home to some 400,000 people and built on swampland near the sea. This jumble of rickety shacks and foul-smelling open drains contains its own neighbourhoods with ironic names like Brooklyn and Tokyo.

Haiti's social extremes are glaringly visible and statistically shocking. It has more millionaires per head than any Latin American or Caribbean nation – an estimated 10,000 Haitians out of a population of 6.8 million live in unabashed luxury. Yet this is also the poorest country in the Americas, with an annual income per person of around $250. According to every conceivable social indicator it sits at the bottom of the league. Compared with its middle-income Caribbean neighbours, the levels of deprivation are extraordinary.



The separate worlds of the rich élite and the poor majority are nothing new. Formerly Saint Domingue, one of the most profitable colonies in the world, Haiti was 'born in ruins' after a 13-year civil war against the French colonial masters. Half a million slaves, led by Toussaint Louverture and later Jean-Jacques Dessalines, overthrew Napoleon's military might in the only successful slave revolution in history. Independence in 1804 was a triumph for black self-emancipation and a fatal blow to slavery around the world. But it also ushered in a succession of military despots, who ruled and robbed the impoverished country.

Descendants of the mixed-race minority freed by the colonialists, a small sector of lighter-skinned Haitians, dominated commerce and political power from the outset. Gradually a gulf developed between the urban French-speaking élite and the great mass of Creole-speaking rural poor, working their peasant smallholdings. That gulf still exists today, although many small farmers have abandoned their eroded mountainside plots to swell the ranks of Cité Soleil's inhabitants.

Politics has always reflected Haiti's social apartheid. Most governments have defended the interests of the few, taxing the peasantry but sparing the rich. For three decades the dictators François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier and his son 'Baby Doc' claimed to represent the black majority, but merely enriched themselves and their cronies. Under their rule, Haiti became a byword for repression, but a convenient source of cheap labour for US offshore manufacturers. When Baby Doc was whisked away by the Americans in 1986 to avert a full-scale revolution, the Haitian military swiftly filled the void and business continued as usual.

In hurricane-prone Haiti, *lavalas* is the name given to the devastating flash floods which run down the eroded hillsides, washing away everything in their path. It was also the name chosen by a small and short-sighted Roman Catholic priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, for his electoral coalition in 1990. After years of military coups and puppet regimes, Aristide swept to power in Haiti's first-ever free elections. Promising radical reforms, 'Titid' was greeted as a Messiah by the poor, as a dangerous subversive by the rich. After only eight months, the military stepped in once more and put an end to the short-lived democracy.

Nearly a decade later, Aristide is tipped to win the next elections in 2000. It took a US intervention to return him to power in 1994, but too late to bring about real change. Nobody knows whether Aristide can do any more next time around. In the meantime, the rich still look down on the poor and the view from the hills is still beautiful – if you don't look too closely. ■

James Ferguson

AT A GLANCE

PANOS PICTURES

Leader: President René Préval.

Economy: GNP per capita $310 (Dominican Republic $1,600, Canada $19,020). When last profiled in 1989 the GNP per capita stood at $360.

Monetary unit: gourde.

Main exports: coffee, garments, sports equipment (to US market).

External debt: $800 million.

Debt service: 11% of exports.

People: 7.4 million.

Health: Infant mortality 92 per 1,000 live births (Jamaica 10, France 5). Calorie intake 75% of UN requirement. Public health provision is virtually non-existent, while malnutrition, malaria and AIDS are widespread.

Environment: Haiti faces ecological disaster, as irreversible erosion follows deforestation caused by the need for firewood and charcoal.

Culture: Haiti is 95% black, with a small mixed-race population. African traditions are most noticeable in farming and rural house-building techniques, while a French colonial legacy is still evident among the élite.

Religion: About 70% of Haitians are Catholics, although Protestant sects are growing. Even more widespread is *vodun* (voodoo), practised by most rural communities, often alongside Christianity.

Languages: *Kweyol* (Creole) is spoken and understood by all Haitians; about 20% speak French. Both are official languages.

Sources: *Latin America and the Caribbean 2000, Caribbean Insight, Haiti Online, State of the World's Children 1999.*

Last profiled December 1989.

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★
A tiny élite dominates, with only a small middle class of civil servants and professionals. Over 75% of people live in poverty.
1989★

LITERACY ★
Poor educational provision means that only 45% are literate.
1989★★

SELF-RELIANCE ★
Dependent on food aid and flooded by contraband, Haiti is losing its food supply to environmental degradation.
1989★

FREEDOM ★★★
Much improved since 1994 US/UN intervention, but political killings and police brutality are widely reported.
1989★★

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★
Individual women have recently made progress in politics and the professions.
1989★★★

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★
54 years. Compares with 71 in neighbouring Dominican Republic and an average 75 throughout the Caribbean.
1989★

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★★ The political climate is far better than under military rule but, weakened by factional infighting, the Préval Government has not implemented much-needed reforms. Aristide's return is seen as inevitable but it remains to be seen whether he will address the grotesque inequalities or preside over an IMF-approved 'modernization' agenda in return for aid.

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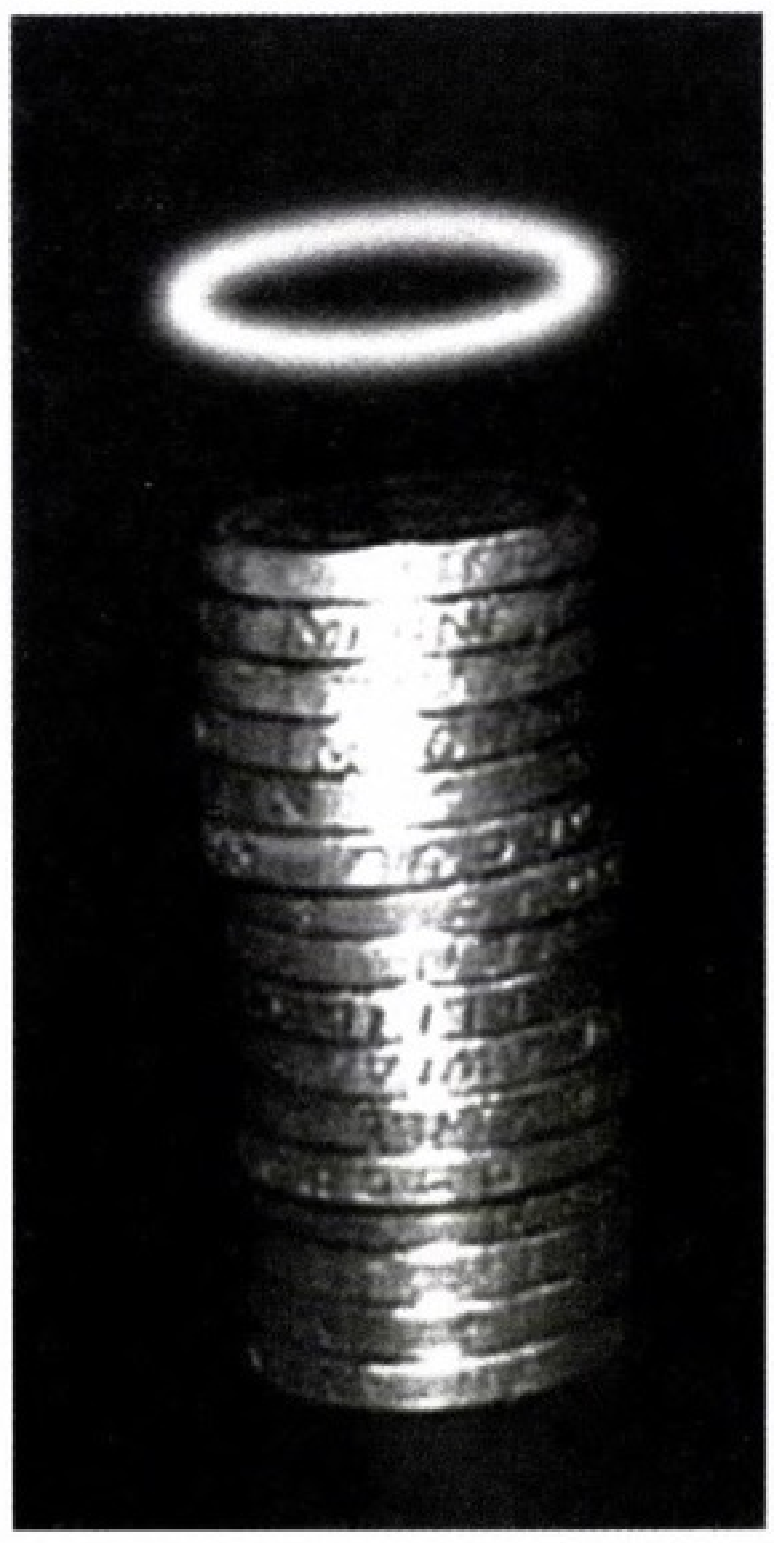

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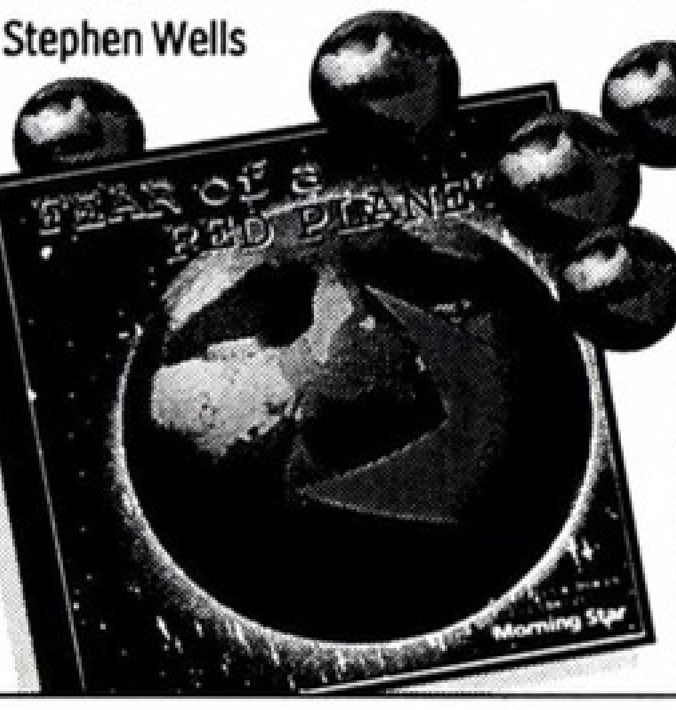
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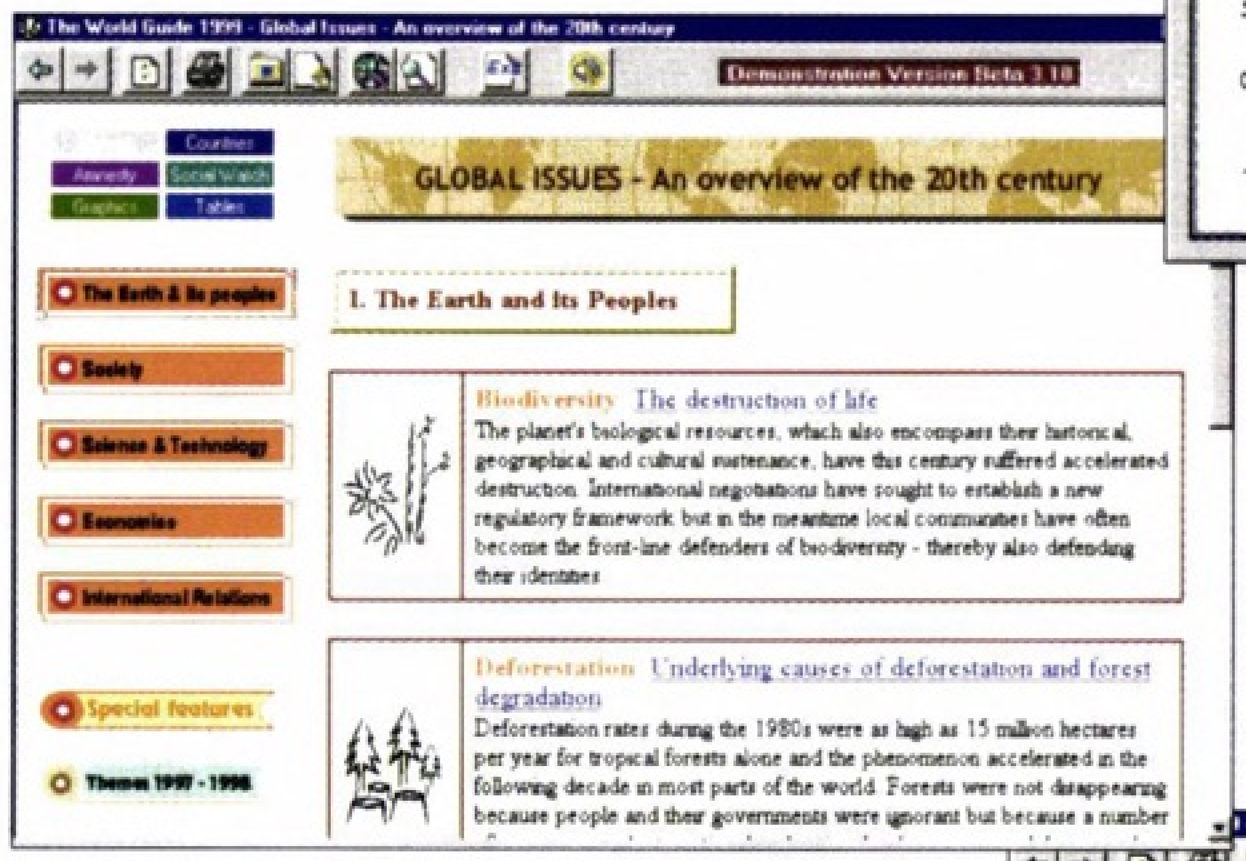

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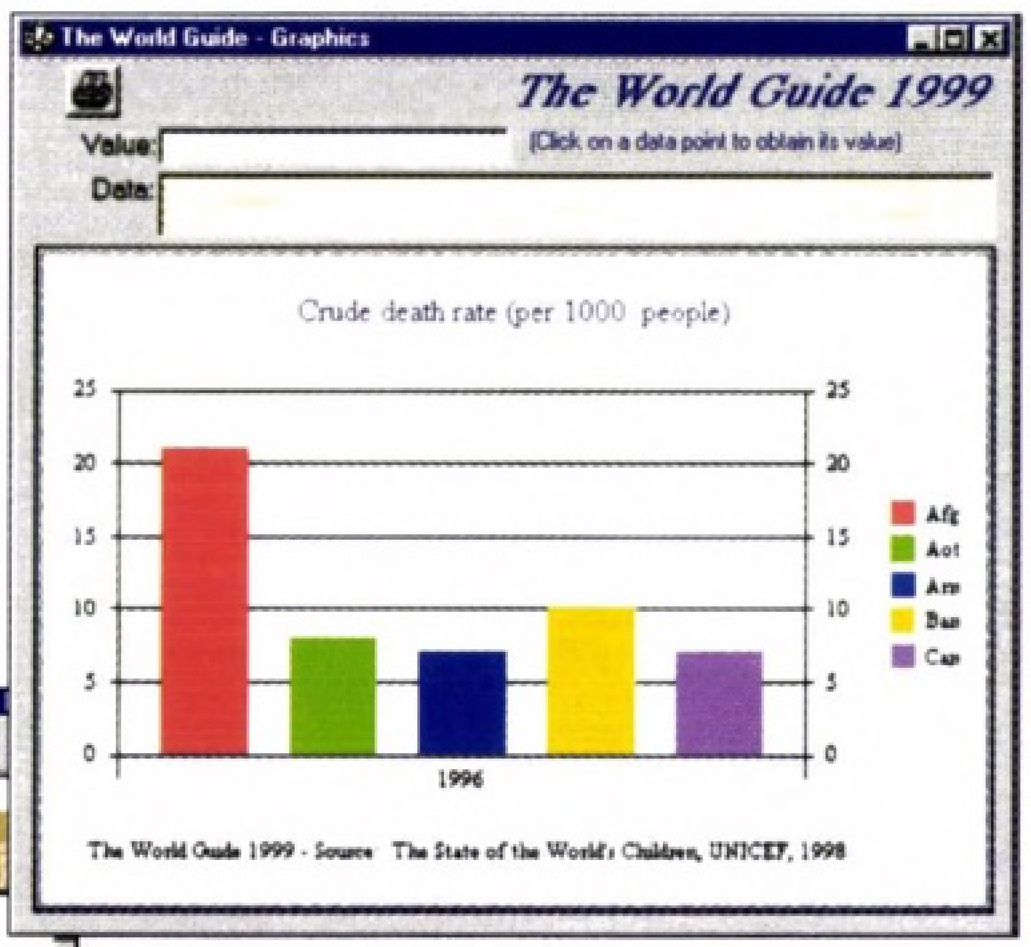

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20
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The World Guide 1999 - Source: The State of the World's Children, UNICEF, 1998

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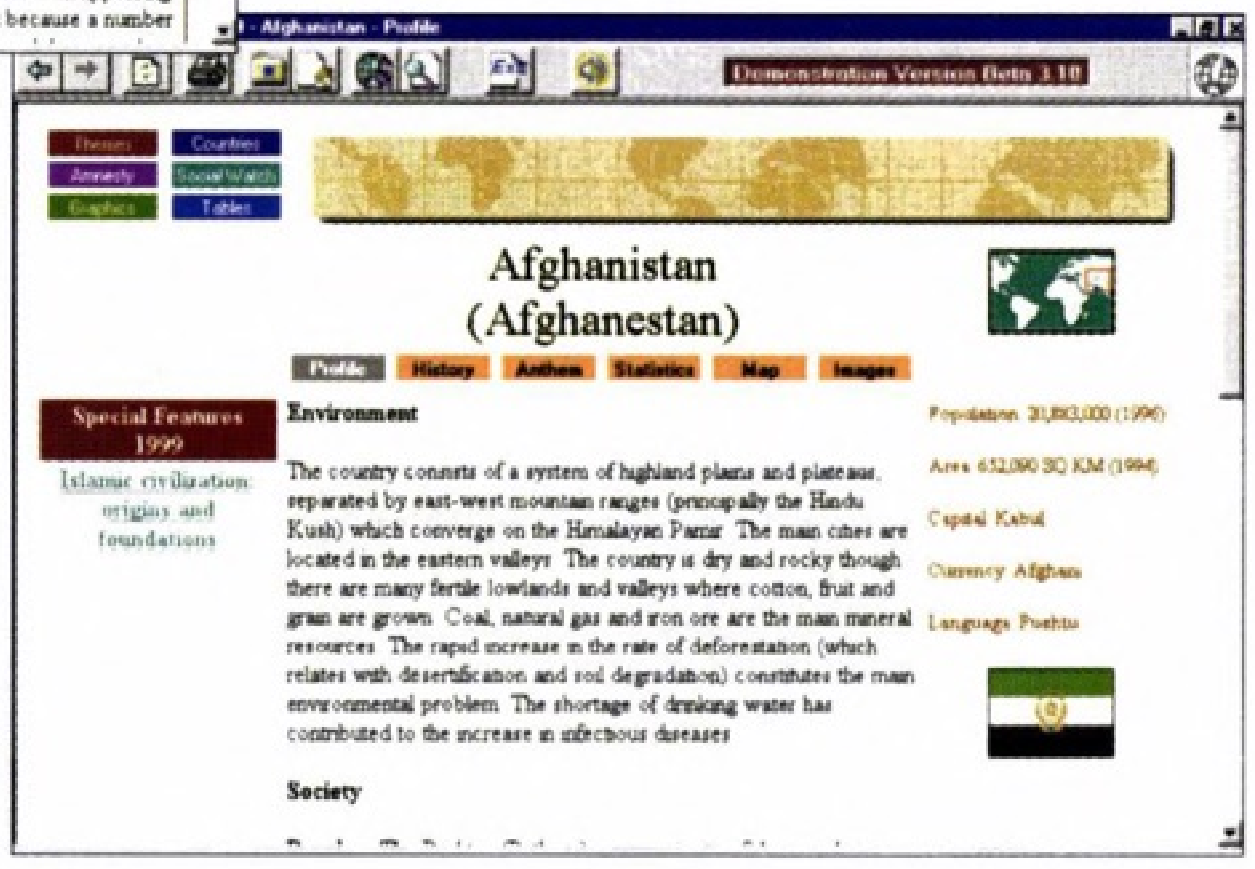

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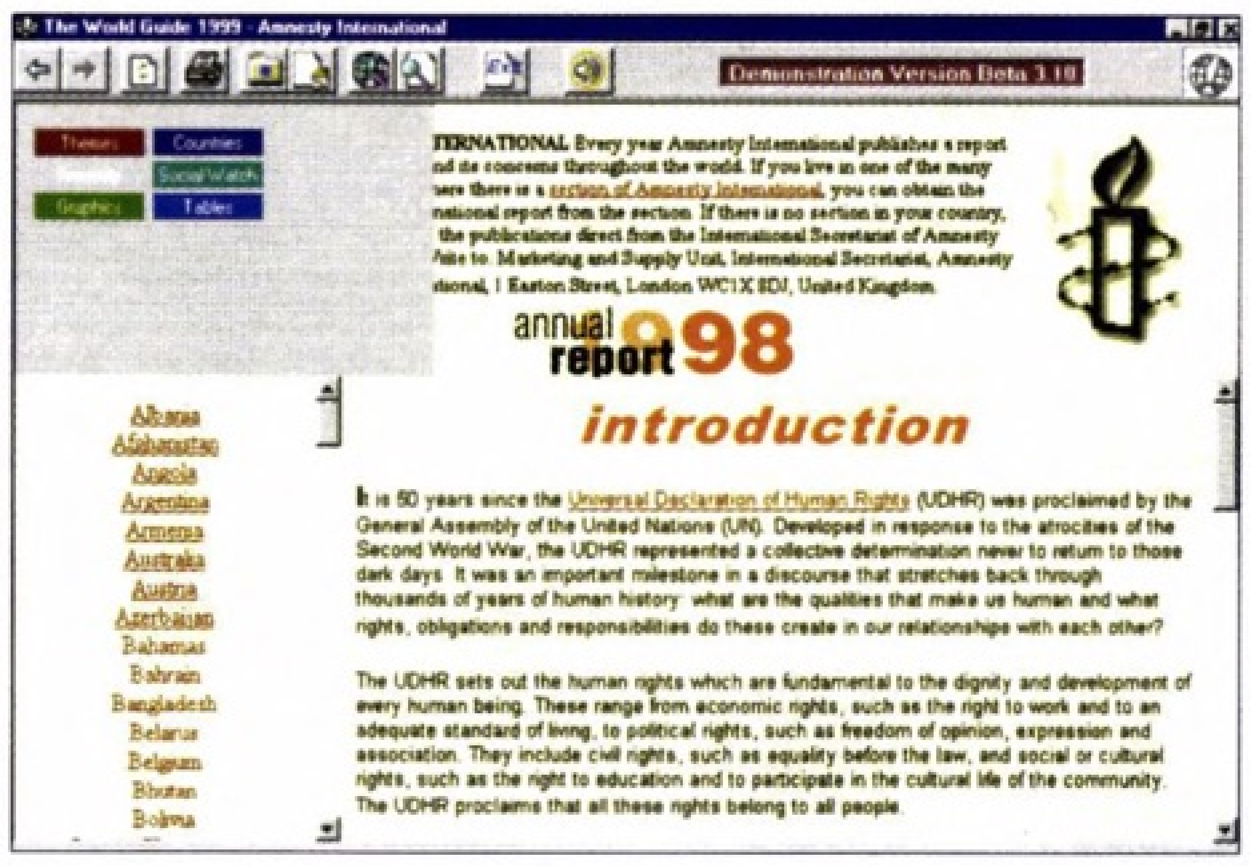
Currency Afghani
Language Pashtu



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